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By Eric C. Baldwin
GLOBAL PRESS NETWORK

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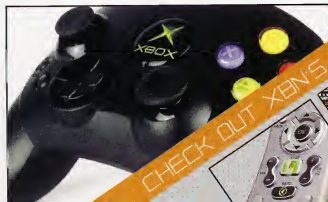
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CHECK OUT XBN'S NEW LIVE SECTION!

EXTRA LIFE

XBN: Redesigned. Rebuilt. Reloaded.

▶ You might be wondering whether this is, indeed, the Xbox Nation you have come to know, love, and cherish. I can tell you that yes, it is. Only better looking, and with more games and more screens of games and more of, well, everything. Alternatively, you might be thinking, "What the hell have they done to my beloved XBN?" A valid question, and the answer is simple: We've sent it to the gym, bought it cool new clothes and quite possibly, a bit of a tan. We hope you'll agree that it looks pretty fresh. The third possibility is that you picked up this magazine by mistake. My apologies. You'll find *Import Tuner* three magazines to the right.

But once you get over the shock of the new, you might be interested to know that this issue sports the world's first review of *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow*—a sequel worthy of its predecessor in every respect and resplendent in its new live incarnation. Additionally, *Hifman* contrasts reveals its dark underbelly, and we investigate just what those recently leaked Xbox Next specs really mean to the future of Xbox gaming. Add to that a brand-new section dealing with the Xbox Live side of life, and I hope you'll agree that it's a pretty attractive package.

Welcome to the new Xbox Nation.
—Simon Cox, Editor-in-Chief

XEN

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Who's who on XBN

SIMON COX

Expatiate
▶ Plucky cartoon Brit Simon Cox, showing the stiff upper lip characterized by the brave English regulars slaughtered at the Battle of New Orleans (1814-1815), came to America to civilize the natives, but instead ended up making videogame magazines and wondering why no one in this godforsaken heckhole would like the pinky out while sipping tea. You've last seen him at GMR.

ANDREW BURWELL

Extant
▶ Former gangsta rapper Vanilla Chessa-ke has remade himself as Xbox Nation's new art director, Andrew Burwell. Now his greatest hits come on each and every page, and art for art's sake is in full effect, sucka. There will be no more frontin'. You've last seen him on the pages of GameNow, now GameOver.

CHE CHOU

Experimental
▶ Former Mr. Olympia 1992, Che Chou first gained prominence for his work on EGM, a magazine that may or may not be about something specific, we are entirely too busy to investigate. Now, as previews editor, Che knows what's coming down the pike long before the pike has even been constructed. You've last seen him in the major motion picture *Money 2: The Resurrection*.

ANDREW MENDOZA

Exaltible
▶ The feel-good associate art director of the year, young Andrew Mendoza is the glue that, um, glues Xbox Nation together. Not the literal glue, mind you—that stuff's put on in the printing house—but rather the spiritual glue that's not so sticky when you get it on your hands. Now where were we? You've last seen him showing off pictures of his yet-undown pipe who will no doubt grow up to be King. Or Queen.

GREG ORLANDO

Exceptional
▶ The resolution to make Greg Orlando the Vanguard for the People has passed with unanimous consent, and the now-extinct ancient Phoenicians believe he is the greatest man to ever write his own editorial biography for Xbox Nation. You've last seen a reasonable facsimile of his smooth good looks on the back of a milk carton.

EVAN SHAMOON

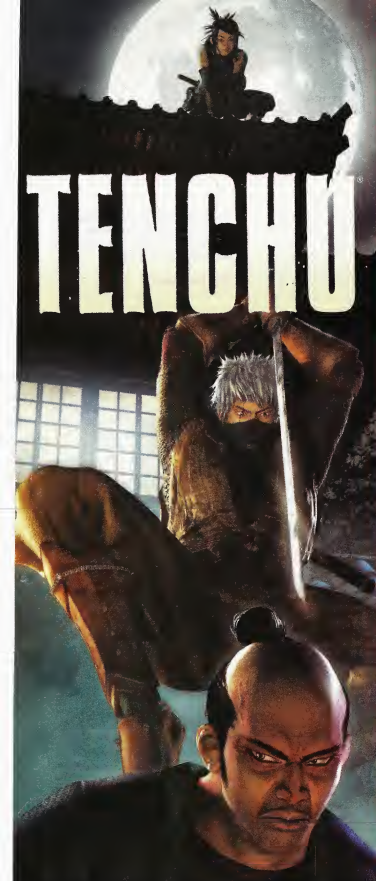
Exasperated
▶ Evan Shamoan's résumé reads like a Norman Mailer novel, except with less emphasis on dead downs and more random comments that [insert game name here] looks like the ass-end of a flutulent mule. He now runs XBN's new Live section, which is remarkable since he does, in fact, live. You've last seen him wrestling with his conscience in the steel cage.

DAVID CHEN

Experienced
▶ David Chen comes to XBN from GMR, which is ADK in the USA and, perhaps, Guam. Now XBN's news editor, Chen is like the magazine's Walter Cronkite, or at bare minimum its Connie Chung. Someday people are going to have a fine time deciphering the cryptic phrase, "He got Chennead." You've last seen him out on the streets proclaiming that he is, in fact, "The Original Gamer."

CINDY LUM

Expressive
▶ A former editor at a snowboarding magazine, Cindy Lum is the kind of person who sings songs about people callously leaving cakes out in the rain and lamenting the loss of recipes, which makes the XBN staff members quite hungry. Now all she does is wonder if you made them and they made you, then who picked up the bill when who made who? You've last seen her trying to burn a bunch of shoeless, moonshine-drinking yokels into shreds, moonshine-drinking yokels.



TENCHU

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evil reemerges,
so must those
who silence it.*

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ACTIVISION

activision.com



It's the Simple Things...

Why didn't Microsoft make the X button on the Xbox controller a button?

Steven C. Foster

We actually forwarded this great question to Microsoft and got no "official" response. The PR representative we spoke to suggested it was just one of those things that really can't be answered. We blame it on the gremlins.

XPRESS

LETTERS

"A COUPLE OF SEGA EXCLUSIVES HAVE MANAGED TO CONVERT ME—FORMERLY ANTI-XBOX—INTO AN XBOX FAN."

Seriously lacking seriousness

I really enjoy your magazine, and I like that you seem to be different from that official publication and other gaming rags in general. While looking at the Inbox section of your March '04 (#12) issue, however, I noticed something you did that every other gaming magazine does also.

There was a very good letter from Ted Bliggs about a serious concern he had with XBN's reviews, and frankly, I agree with him. But more important, in response to his serious concern, you didn't address his thoughts. No, you simply made a joke! This drives me INSANE! And every other gaming mag does this same thing! When someone writes you a serious letter, GIVE THEM A SERIOUS RESPONSE! Otherwise, you're just wasting their time and yours!

Andrew Haynes

Here's five minutes off both our lives, Andrew. Don't expect to get them back at the end.

Postcard from the rubber room

What's cookin'? No really, what's cooking? Because I'm starving. The gaming powers that be keep pushing back due dates of all the games I want to buy, *Fable* and *Halo 2* for instance. My therapist says this isn't good for my mental health, considering the trauma of psychotically waiting each day, sitting still, waiting for Baldur's Gate II, whose release date was pushed back for quite a few months. But before I have a relapse, when are the gaming gods finally going to grant us these really awesome games?

Isaac Estep

Probably not before the Thorazine kicks in or you get the bill in the mail.

Backward incompatibility

First I hear the Xbox 2 won't have a built-in hard drive, now this news of incompatibility with my beloved Xbox. Xbox is the best-designed console I've



ever seen, what with the hard drive and the CD-ripping ability (which is woefully underused by game developers—it's a simple pleasure to

blat the Bee Gee's *Stayin' Alive* during *X2: Wolverine's Revenge*), the DVD playback, the four controller ports (take that, Sony!), the large, flat box design (my GameCube sits comfortably on top of it as we speak), the Xbox Live service, and the upcoming Xbox music mixer. Microsoft put a lot of thought into this as a game machine, and as it stands, it's the best package of any console ever produced. Moving backwards for the Xbox 2 would hurt Microsoft's integrity as a world-class publisher and developer—a position it has to struggle to maintain since Nintendo's and Sony's first- and second-party developers are better. And turning its back on the games of this generation is practically spitting upon what they've already managed to accomplish in this business.

With the help of a couple Sega exclusives like *Panzer Dragoon Orta* and *Jet Set Radio Future*, the games have managed to convert me, formerly anti-Xbox, into an Xbox fan. This is the first generation of game machines whose content will not lose its luster in the face of its successors, so I wanna play my *Halo* alongside the inevitable *Halo 3* for Xbox 2! Is it really that hard to imagine a little "Xbox Emulator" button alongside the Memory, Music, Xbox Live, and Settings options on the current system menu? What do you think XBN?

Vince Vazquez

We think Xbox 2 needs two things. One is backward compatibility. The other is backward compatibility.

Fight the power

Concerning EA's lack of support for Xbox

Live, I can't help but think how ridiculous it all is. EA has long desired to get a piece of the online pie but has failed time and time again. EA's new sports stats and match-up service is a nice feature, but it's not enough to draw people into paying monthly subscription fees. What makes EA think it is entitled to a portion of the subscription prices that Microsoft collects for Xbox Live? How arrogant! How many times must EA fail before it learns this lesson? How much money is it willing to lose before they give up?

I'm not trying to say that any of this is cutting into their bottom line by a meaningful measure, but it's a simple fact: EA sells a ridiculous amount of games. It would sell even more if it was on board for Xbox Live. I am just one voice, but I do not and will not buy an Electronic Arts game until it supports Xbox Live.

Joe Dennis

Brain teaser

Do you guys have any inside information on *Psychonauts*? I'm a huge Tim Schafer fan; I've been waiting for this game ever since launch, and even the Double Fine Action News page (www.doublefine.com/news.htm) is slow in giving up any details.

Jeremy Voss

Here's an interesting *Psychonauts* tidbit: Talented writer Erik Wolpaw, one of the brilliant minds behind www.oldmanmurray.com (check it out or be forever uncool), is helping out with the game's plot and dialogue.

When brevity was wit...

True Crime
Streets of L.A.
Larry

Thanks for taking the time to write, Larry—the unusually short length of your letter made the copy desk's job much easier than usual this month. XBN agrees with you on your primary point: True Crime: Streets of L.A. is.



XPRESS

XBOX NEWS NETWORK APRIL 2004

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"I THINK WE'LL BE CHASING TOY STORY UNTIL WE REACH IT, AND THEN WE'LL BE CHASING GOLLUM." —AARON LOEB, PLANET MOON STUDIOS

GREAT X-SPEC-TATIONS

Xbox Nation examines the "leaked" specs for Xbox Next

Long before the dust settles from round one of Microsoft versus Nintendo versus Sony, from "senior sources," developers, and industry insiders comes the first set of specs for Microsoft's successor to Xbox. But do the specs bang? Or do they whimper?

Dubbed Xbox Next, the console's alleged specs—a custom-created ATI chip, 256MB of RAM (or possibly 512MB, reportedly depending on what hand Sony plays with its PS3), and a graphics chip that will run faster than today's top PC graphics cards—are already fanning the fires of rabid speculation. Clearly, many questions won't be answered until the system's projected 2005 release, which should see a launch concurrent with—if not before—Sony's PS3. Of course, these specs will likely change; this is simply Microsoft's way of beating its chest before the Game Developers Conference in March and E3 after that. Xbox Nation enlisted Aaron Loeb, producer for Planet Moon's explosive laugh riot *Armed and Dangerous*, to help us crunch these impressive-sounding numbers.

ROUND ONE: THE LOOK

More than anything else, when it comes to graphics, gamers expect to be wowed. So what might the next generation of Xbox games look like? Consider the image to the left: Four years ago this posturing pair left quite an impression when they strutted their stuff—in real time—at the GDC in March of 2000, where Bill Gates chose to unveil what was by then the worst-kept "secret" in the industry. Four years later, you'd be hard pressed to stake the claim that many—if any—Xbox games look even close to that good. But might one generation's tech demos not define the next generation's in-game graphics? Loeb agrees: "The Xbox is capable of producing images of this quality both in terms of textures and poly count. The

issue is that once you put in all those pesky things like AI and collision, it is hard to continue on that vein of visual quality and maintain a playable framerate. The same is true of every generation's tech demos. If [those specs] are accurate, there shouldn't be any problem having an image of this quality—or even higher—in a fully interactive environment, meaning controllable characters, collision, lots of special effects like specular highlights, bump mapping, etc." Looking good, then...

ROUND TWO: THE FEEL

The actual interactive experience is also apt to change—and ideally improve—just as much as graphics. "The other big push you're going to see is numbers," Loeb says. "This generation, most games pit you against two or three polished enemies at a time. With the next generation, you'll have enemies that look just as polished, but you'll have about 10 times as many."

Regarding numbers, it's been revealed that Xbox Next will use three 64-bit processors. When asked to help make sense of the math, Loeb says, "Apple has, been using dual processors for its high-end desktop machines for quite a while, and I believe multi-processor machines are what they use at places like Pixar for rendering out extremely high-quality animation." And wasn't Pixar's *Toy Story* once used as an example of the graphical quality audiences were supposed to be enjoying right now? "I think we'll be chasing *Toy Story* until we reach it," Loeb says, "and then we'll be chasing *Gollum*."

ROUND THREE: ONE STEP FORWARD...

Right now, Xbox Live is undeniably the most ergonomic way for console gamers to get their game on—online. But despite its success, it's not yet hit its full stride. "Because only a fraction of the Xbox install base subscribes to Xbox Live, few people took the risk of making it a core

feature," Loeb says. "When it was used as a 'nice' feature, it was often the first thing cut because—again—it represented only a fraction of the install base." But more and more households are going broadband each day, making it likely that the coming console wars will be fought online.

ROUND FOUR: TWO STEPS BACK?

Those "fractions" could go some way to rationalizing the persistent rumor that Xbox Next will ship sans hard drive. How crucial could this seemingly retrograde choice be? "This was the generation of multiformal games—a lot of games for Xbox also showed up on PS2 and GameCube, and those consoles didn't have hard drives," Loeb says. "Most developers used the hard drive for scratch space. Well, Microsoft can just use much cheaper flash memory for that." It's also been suggested that due to the decision to replace Nvidia with ATI as the processor for its next graphics chip, Xbox Next might not play games designed for the original Xbox. A shame—if true—but it's no deal breaker.

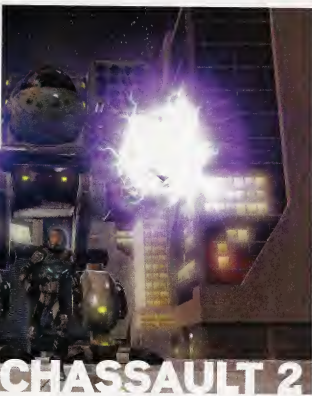
FINAL ROUND: BACK TO BASICS

Gamers follow the games, and if 2003's sales figures are any gauge, then they will flock to them based first and foremost on familiarity. A brief look at the top 10 best-selling games for Xbox showed they were almost entirely familiar to consumers by way of license (*Star Wars: KotOR*, *Enter The Matrix*, brand (Madden, *Tom Clancy*), or concept (*GTA Double Pack*, *True Crime: Streets of L.A.*).

And while the next-gen landscape might look a little homogenous (see *XBN's Shelf* feature on page 18), it's sure to look good. "That robot from the old tech demo ain't the half of it. You'll be able to produce something as beautiful as nearly any prerendered cut-scene you've seen, and in real time," Loeb says. But everyone said that last time, didn't they?



Left to right: Xbox tech demos from Game Developers Conference in March 2000; Pixar's *Toy Story*; and *The Lord of the Rings*' Gollum.



FIRST LOOK

MECHASSAULT 2

Day 1 makes heavy metal cool again

Who knew?

The term "mech" is trademarked by TMS, which is owned by Microsoft. So watch your language, kids.

The half-million or so Xbox Live users looking to fill the Halo-shaped hole in their hearts now have one more reason to hope for a speedy summer—Microsoft Game Studios recently announced a fall ship date for MechAssault 2. Development duties go to Day 1 Studios, boding well for this sequel; MechAssault's blend of gunplay and simple strategy may not have been revolutionary, but it looked, played, and sounded great, making it the perfect showcase for a nascent network of Xbox Live users.

Press-release promises include a fleshed-out single-player campaign, with more NPC interaction and mission variety to compensate for some of the original game's few significant shortcomings. In an effort to immerse players more deeply in the warriors' lifestyle, the array of available vehicles at each mission's start has been

boosted from the bipedal variety to include treaded (tanks) and airborne (VTOLs) options. But the most

intriguing new addition to the MechAssault arsenal

is BattleArmor: a smaller, but no less

deadly, counterpart to the 40-foot mechs that have defined the franchise. The ability for BattleArmor-clad players to scale walls and snag a ride on airborne VTOLs should bring some much welcome variety to the action. And, in keeping with the times, BattleArmor users will also be able to hijack enemy mechs. Should this turn out to be anything like what it's promising, Xbox Live should be riddled with explosions and explosives all over again this winter. //

More info at: www.xbox.com

WHAT WE SAID:
MechAssault // XBN 05

"MechAssault is one of those titles that will have you hooked long after you finish the single-player game. It won't blow your mind, but it's a solid showcase for online console gaming."

XBN RATING: 7.0

RED VS. BLUE
COLOR-CODED COMEDY

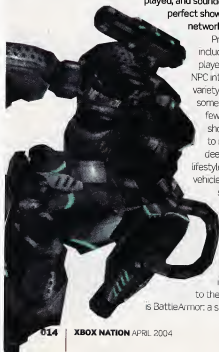
Red vs. Blue, the award-winning series that takes Halo video footage and rejiggers it with comic voiceovers and clever video editing, continues on to its second season. The series follows the exploits of two teams—Red and Blue—trapped in Blood Gulch. Each week, new episodes are made available; subscribers get first crack at downloading higher-res versions. The first season has been compiled into a full DVD, and series fans should also check out the demo disc included with the May 2004 issue of Computer Gaming World, which will feature an exclusive animated short. //

More info at: www.redvsblue.com

CLOCK THIS!
WE CAN REBUILD IT...

Further evidence, if any were needed, that our beloved Xbox is a PC in gym clothes, comes to us courtesy of Taiwanese chip wizards Friendtech. Stripping the Box down to its mere undergarments, donning rubber gloves, and poking around with a soldering iron has allowed them to replace the Xbox CPU with one twice as fast (1.4GHz). Friendtech was also able to upgrade the available RAM from 64MB to 128MB and has dubbed this new, faster Xbox "DreamX." Theoretically, those games that slow to a crawl during explosions or complex action sequences (cough, Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance; cough, Deus Ex: The Invisible War) should now run much more smoothly. //

More info at: www.upgrade123.com



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new sets released

RECEIVED
MAY 15 1964

OPPOSITE
PAINING



UPGRADES

**LIVE
CHAT!**

PRIZES

PLAYERS R HERE!

The logo for Magic: The Gathering Online. The word "MAGIC" is in a large, stylized, orange and yellow font with a red outline. Below it, "The Gathering" is in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. At the bottom, "ONLINE" is in a large, white, stylized font with a black outline.

DEADLIEST STRATEGIES



PLACE TO PLAY: WWW.MAGICTHEGATHERING.COM THIS IS THE PLACE
TO PLAY: WWW.MAGICTHEGATHERING.COM THIS IS THE PLACE
TO PLAY: WWW.MAGICTHEGATHERING.COM THIS IS THE PLACE

SHELF HELP

SHOOTERS, SPORTS, AND DRIVING GAMES DOMINATE THE XBOX LANDSCAPE, BUT IS THERE ROOM FOR SOMETHING DIFFERENT? *Xbox Nation* INVESTIGATES...

Words: Jason Brookes Illustration: Andre Sibayan



▶ If there's such a thing as a sweet spot, Microsoft hit it last fall, resulting in a better lineup of games in established genres than the games industry has ever seen—which is great news if you're trying to shift Xboxes by the truckload. And not bad for gamers, either.

The fact is that today's market is virtually unrecognizable from even a few years ago. It's now global in its breadth, mainstream in its demography, and cripplingly expensive in terms of development. Marketing and brand building aren't just tactics employed to enhance a product's chances, but also vital tools needed to compete in the market—especially if you're up against behemoths like EA.

The financial risks are now so great that it's not surprising that Xbox publishers have already largely determined what does—and does not—sell. And perusing the Xbox aisle at a typical software store is bound to elicit different responses. Marketing departments might call it "expansive," while the games press might choose "limited" as a more fitting description. But there's no escaping the fact that Xbox is in little danger of running out of sports games, racing games, or first-person shooters anytime soon.

But let's be sensible. No one, least of all XBN, is going to complain about a "derivative" new Halo or "yet another" Half-Life. Sequels have become an intrinsic part of how game design tends to move forward. But is a little more variety really too much to ask for?

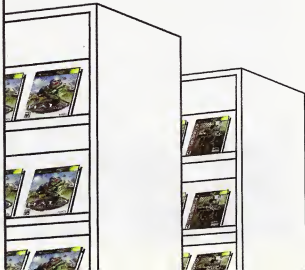
Giving people what they want is nothing new. McDonald's is selling salads now, but it's doubtful it's doing so because of concerns for your health. So perhaps the transition we're adjusting to is simply the videogaming equivalent of the Atkins diet—instant gratification via an abundance of stuff consumers understand (most crucially, guns, sports leagues, and performance alloys) without any of the boring, stodgy excess (unfamiliar game dynamics and learning curves). >>>

"IT IS NO SECRET THAT SHOOTERS, RACERS, AND SPORTS GAMES SELL—ON ALL PLATFORMS. THIS IS THE CURRENT TREND IN THE GAMING INDUSTRY, NOT JUST THE XBOX. AS THE XBOX AUDIENCE CONTINUES TO GROW AND DIVERSIFY, SO WILL THE GAMES. UBISOFT IS A STEP AHEAD BY ALREADY OFFERING GAMES LIKE PRINCE OF PERSIA AND BEYOND GOOD & EVIL."

—TONY KEE, UBISOFT

"I THINK WE'RE ALWAYS GOING TO HAVE THE GAMING EQUIVALENT OF HOLLYWOOD BLOCKBUSTERS, AND GAMES THAT HAVE TENS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS SPENT ON THEM WILL ALWAYS BE MORE HIGH PROFILE. BUT GOING FORWARD, I THINK MIDDLEWARE WILL MEAN TEAMS DON'T HAVE TO SPEND A LONG TIME CREATING TECHNOLOGY AND CAN FOCUS ON CONTENT. I THINK WE WILL START TO SEE THE GAMING EQUIVALENT OF ART-HOUSE MOVIES."

—PETER MOLYNEUX



"WE HAVE STOLEN CONSUMERS FROM THE TV NETWORKS AND THEIR ADVERTISERS, AND THERE ARE BILLION-DOLLAR MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO WIN THEM BACK."

—SCOTT STEINBERG, SEGA

"I THINK THE TREND TOWARD REALITY IS A GREAT THING BECAUSE IT MAKES THE MEDIUM MORE ACCESSIBLE. WE NEED TO EXPRESS OUR CREATIVITY IN NEW WAYS: THROUGH THE CHARACTERS WE CREATE AND THE SITUATIONS WE PUT THEM IN."

—ED FRIES

"WE BELIEVE THERE IS ALWAYS A PLACE FOR WELL-MADE GAMES THAT FOCUS ON STRONG CHARACTERS AND STORY—INEVITABLY, THESE GAMES TEND TO BE MORE COMPLEX, BUT THEY ALSO SEEM TO BE MORE REWARDING. WE'VE BEEN VERY HAPPY WITH THE CRITICAL AND COMMERCIAL SUCCESS WE'VE SEEN ON THE XBOX WITH STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC."

—GREG ZESCHUK, BIOWARE



CASE STUDY 1

WEIRD AND WONDERFUL: THE JAPANESE CONNECTION

Occasionally, we like our games freaky looking, preferably served with a side order of dementia. And Japan duly delivers in this respect. Xbox's relative lack of Japanese support, however, sadly precludes more "out there" stuff from permeating the racks at Toys "R" Us, which means gamers may well be denied upcoming Xbox oddities such as From Software's strategy hybrid, *Thousand Land*, and Red Entertainment's promising virtual life project, *N.U.D.E* (no, it's not quite what you think).

Eidos' Fresh Games label was set up to afford more quirky or underground Japanese titles a Western release—even if it is only PS2 owners who reap the benefits (currently Irem's *R-Type Final*). So what chance is there of such an endeavor on Xbox? Eidos Interactive's President Rob Dyer: "The problem is it's hard to find games that translate well into the American market. We'd be more than happy to do such things on the Xbox, but there's not a whole lot of stuff being developed in Japan right now that's Japan only."

So for now, perhaps we should just be thankful for Tecmo. Because anyone who's played *DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball* will certainly have experienced one of Xbox's more bizarre offerings—a game whose success has everything to do with sunsets, shopping, and skimpy bikinis and absolutely nothing to do with volleyball. Inspired.





CASE STUDY 2

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW:

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

➤ As a fusion of console-style adventuring and PC-style AD&D dynamics, BioWare's *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (KOTOR) stands out not only as one of the most accomplished games on Xbox, but also as one of the most original console RPGs out there. But considering market trends, it's both puzzling and refreshing how this deep, hardcore title managed to become one of the fastest-selling games on the system. But then again, the *Star Wars* tag never did anyone any harm.

"You can't make a game appeal to everyone," BioWare joint CEO Dr. Ray Muzyka says, "but you can make parts of it appeal to lots of small groups of people, which, when added up, result in a larger audience." Joint CEO Greg Zeschuk adds, "We walked a careful line between the new features that hadn't been seen in a console game before and the standard console practices, but we seemed to make the right choices to increase the originality of the game without turning off fans."

While KOTOR fans may have been delighted, Eidos is understandably miffed that its excellent *Deus Ex: Invisible War*—another deep PC-style RPG with a hardcore following—wasn't shown the same love. Was KOTOR just a flash in the pan? The impending arrival of other genre-bending titles such as *Fable*, *BC*, *Psychonauts*, and *Jade Empire*, BioWare's own follow-up, will tell.

"It's hard for publishers to convince themselves to put a lot of marketing behind something new," Ed Fries, former VP of games publishing at Microsoft's Game Studios, concedes. "Most new things fail. But it's the only way to get people to try it and see if they like it. My 2-year-old son always wants me to read him the same books at bedtime, but if I can get him to sit still and hear something new, it often becomes one of his favorites."

GROWING UP

Of course, there are many issues at stake, but changing consumer tastes—as a result of players having grown up and expecting their games to have done the same—are undoubtedly key. But instead of trying to teach casual gamers unfamiliar game dynamics, these days the industry knows it's easier to revise and improve existing formulas—preferably using touchstones such as movies, sports, and, increasingly, urban street culture as the carrot. This is evidenced by the success of EA's *NBA Street* series, *Need for Speed Underground*, and Eidos' *Backyard Wrestling*—all a far cry from your little brother rounding up cute Pikmin on his little purple GameCube.

For a few companies, these harsh realities came most sharply into view last fall as some of the freshest Xbox games yet seen languished on store shelves across the nation: Planet Moon's *Armored and Dangerous*, Eidos' *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, and, perhaps most notably, Ubisoft's dynamic duo of *Prince of Persia* and *Beyond Good & Evil* all fell victim to an overcrowded market beset with consumer apathy and ignorance. Sales were flat (although they fared better in Europe), and for AAA titles like these, it's hugely dispiriting.

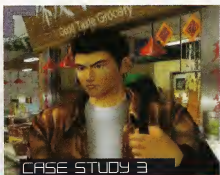
"The videogame industry is difficult to predict," Ubisoft's VP of marketing, Tony Kee says. "Much like the entertainment industry in

general, there's no magic formula for creating a hit. Moreover, launching a new game franchise is extremely difficult in a market flooded with established brands. It takes time, persistence, and a little faith."

However, powerful new ideas sometimes have a way of worming their way into the public's perception on their own. Take Rockstar's *GTA* series. The original 2D series may have built an awareness, but gamers didn't get it until they experienced *GTA3*—and then promptly told all their friends about it. Just as *Pulp Fiction*'s dynamic, multibreed story line had to be experienced rather than conveyed through marketing, a strong underground buzz is occasionally the best form of promotion there is.

Sega's new VP of marketing, videogame-industry veteran Scott Steinberg, agrees. "I'm still of the opinion that this industry can support sleepers that are discovered by the hardcore gaming population, sold to more of a mass market via word of mouth, and which aren't dependent on huge media budgets to make money."

Like *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, perhaps? BioWare's innovative *Star Wars RPG* was released in the summer months last year to a rapturous reception from gamers



CASE STUDY 3

RISKY BUSINESS:

SEGA

➤ You can't help but feel for Sega. Here's a company that has long embraced the quirkier aspects of videogames alongside its more staple output of racing games and beat-'em-ups. But so far, it has failed to ignite the Xbox market. *Jet Set Radio Future*, *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, and *Shenmue II* all broke new ground in their original incarnations, but were they too new, too soon? The titles were "bold, novel entries that were pioneering titles for their time," Sega's Scott Steinberg says. "I absolutely think that the Xbox has room for interesting creative content. The larger, more diverse the user base, the larger the audience will be for risky, groundbreaking projects." Like *Otogi 2*, perhaps? The jury is still out on whether that one will make it to the U.S. market.

and pundits alike, and it immediately set sales records and has continued—mostly through word of mouth—to sell strongly ever since, bolstering Xbox's growing cachet as a hardcore gamer's machine. The company's action-RPG follow-up *Jade Empire* can only help that cause.

In a sea of cookie-cutter titles, perhaps faith in developers such as BioWare, Lionhead (*Fable*, *BC*), and Double Fine Productions (*Psychonauts*) is Xbox's strongest card. But it's still early, and with market forces determining the homogeneity of the majority of videogame releases, whispers of another potential crash simply can't be ignored. Do hardware manufacturers and publishers have a responsibility to each other—and consumers—to prevent this from happening again? The final word goes to Ed Fries: "The industry has to continue to innovate if it wants to survive, and the first-party teams are in the best position to support original, creative work. Many people have forgotten about the crash in the early 1980s, but not me. That's when I was publishing my first games!" //

Jason Brookes was previously editor of U.K. "games bible" *Edge* magazine and is now a freelance games writer.

INBOX

LETTERS APRIL 2004



WRITE US:

As a member of the Xbox Nation, you too, have a forum in which to share your voice.

Send e-mail to XBN@ziffdavis.com or drop us a postcard: Xbox Nation, 101 2nd St., 8th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105

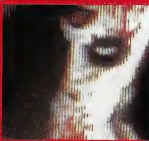
And yes, the letters are answered by a real human being.—

LETTER OF THE MONTH:

Wants to know things

I want to know a couple of things. Well, I've heard that *Manhunt* is coming to Xbox and that would be awesome! Do you know anything about when it will be released? Do you know if the graphics are juiced up or anything will be added? Daniel Harrell

In the spirit of "brevity is the soul of wit," Rockstar Games, maker of *Manhunt*, responds thusly—and we quote: "Yes, *Manhunt* is coming to Xbox, more details to come soon." XBN would like to add that it would be really neat if in the Xbox version of *Manhunt*, when your character killed a lot of people really gruesomely, he got a new hat.



Oh to be a ship on the Crimson Sea

Do you fine folks at Xbox Nation think there's any chance *Crimson Sea 2* will eventually pop up on the Box? I bought the first one back when it was an Xbox exclusive and now...now my heart aches in a swirly abyss of pain and heartburn. Well, not my heart, but my wallet. Now I must buy that PlayStation 2 that I constantly put off buying. Anyway, I just want your insight on this. Will I be playing it only on the PS2? Or someday on the Xbox?

Marc Ampon

Bang the drum slowly for *Crimson Sea 2* on Xbox. Koef's Sales and Marketing Manager Jarik Sikat says, "It looks like Marc will be playing *Crimson Sea 2* only on a PS2. But his dedication and love of the first game will not go unrewarded. We'll try to help ease the pain on his aching heart and wallet by sending him a complimentary copy of the game when it's released. That is, if he can offer up some evidence that he bought a PS2 just to play *Crimson Sea 2*. In the meantime, if Marc is thirsty for more mayhem, he should check out *Dynasty Warriors 4* for Xbox." Adds Sikat, "Xbox owners shouldn't begin to fret. Koef still has plans for other Xbox titles, but that's all I can say for now."

Phantom menace?

Ever since I heard about the Phantom console, I've been wondering a lot of things. When is it supposed to be released? Is it going to be released soon or as a "next-gen" console? If it is going to be released soon, do you expect it to be big competition for the Xbox or PS2?

Max McCorkle

XBN predicts sales of the Atari Jaguar to be greatly hampered upon Phantom's release. Seriously, expect more developments on the Phantom in March, when the console will have its fifth unveiling and possibly its first playtest.

Delicious "Whit"!

When Xbox 2 releases, I hope it has some more multimedia functions, like PVR and DVD+R/RW or HD-DVD/BlueRay DVD+R/RW capabilities along with a smaller frame. It's just too honking big. Scott Whitmore

Oh, Scott Whitmore, your technolust will be your undoing. Personally, we're hoping Xbox 2 comes with rally stripes and a ladle for our soup.

Big in Japan?

This year is continuing to look up for the Xbox (domestically, at least). With plenty of great titles expected in the first half of 2004, such as *Doom 3*, *Halo 2*, and *Unreal* it, as well as Xbox Live on the rise, you'd think that more Asian developers would commit to making Xbox games.

Other than Team Ninja, I cannot think of any developers that even consider the Xbox to be a serious game console. I know that the Xbox is much more powerful, and I've read recently that it's easier to make games for than the PlayStation, so what is the holdup? Is it really because the Xbox is an American console? Will there be more commitments with the release of Xbox 2? Also, will there ever be a decent role-playing game for the system?

Chris Sidwell

Hmm. The list of Japanese Xbox developers includes Konami, Namco, Koei, Sega, the aforementioned Tecmo, From Software, Genki, Anchor, Capcom, Natsume, and Sammy. That's not a list to be sneezed at, coughed upon, or even gazed at with mild revulsion.

Although some Japanese companies have supported Xbox, others have been hesitant to do so. It's uncertain if they're simply banking on the big boy, Sony, or are genuinely adopting a wait-and-see attitude. The release of Xbox 2 will cement Microsoft's reputation as a serious player in the game industry and maybe, just maybe, some of Japan's revered game developers, such as Square Enix, will decide to develop for the new console. But don't hold your breath. Also, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* is a brilliant Xbox RPG.



XPRESS

FAR CRY



COMING
SOON

PARADISE LOST

Far Cry—arguably the PC's best-looking shooter—is coming...

Cry who?

Based in Coburg, Germany, Crytek Studios crafted the squid-based FPS *X-treme* and *Shant* *Space*—a sci-fi strategy sim—neither of which seem to have reached these shores.

◆ A Monet, *Far Cry* is not. As grand from afar as it is up close, this ardently anticipated PC game's tech-demo origins are clearly evident. Massive environments littered with lush vegetation, soft light blooms, water refractions, and bump-mapped—well—everything are all handled with ease by the game's proprietary CryENGINE. Self-shadowing characters and objects only sweeten the pot. In short, if it's a graphics buzzword, it's in *Far Cry*. A view distance of

roughly half a mile out is another testament to the engine's capabilities—and this fall, it's making its Xbox debut.

The CryENGINE is also responsible for the game's sophisticated AI and physics model. The AI is particularly remarkable, with enemies who act—and react—realistically to the player's every move. Accordingly, the truly open-ended level design serves as a perfect sandbox for such a proficient group of baddies. Vehicles—from Hummers to hang gliders—are also thrown into the equation, serving as transportation, dynamic cover, or, simply, weapons to be used by the player and the mercenaries who want them dead.

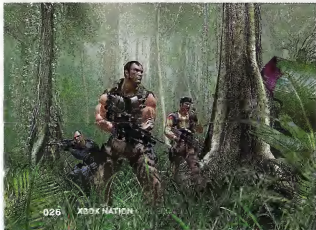
A tropical island serves as the backdrop for this day-after-tomorrow (the year 2020, to be more exact) Halo-meets-Half-Life thriller. As unassuming ex-soldier and boat-skipper extraordinaire Jack Carver, players are thrust

into a tangled web of military conspiracy and experimental genetic research when a run-of-the-mill boat trip goes awry.

The Xbox version of the game will not be a direct port of its PC counterpart. Hard facts are few and far between, but expect a number of campaign alterations—and a heavy emphasis on Xbox Live play, naturally. And while the console edition may not mirror the PC's graphics point for point, it should look damn good. The original tech demo that *Far Cry* is based on exploited the strengths of the GeForce3 graphics chip—the same one you'll find inside your Xbox.

Far Cry may not win any awards for art direction (Jack and Brute Force's Tex must have been separated at birth), but its technical achievements alone make it one to watch—even from a mile away. //

More info at: www.ubi.com/us



TOP 10: XBOX BEST-SELLERS (AS OF FEB. 2004)

ONE



NFL Kickoff

Live: **No** Release: **11/02** Score: **Seven**
What we said: "...enough pass, fancy footwork, and trash talk to fill the post-Super Bowl void."

TWO



Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II

Live: **No** Release: **01/04** Score: **Seven**
What IUP.com said: "...a decent sequel and worthy competition for...Norrath."

THREE



Halo: Combat Evolved

Live: **No** Release: **11/01** Score: **Ten**
What we said: "Halo is, in a word, *insanely great*. Do it up."

FOUR

GTA Double Pack

Live: **No**
Release: **11/03**
Score: **Ten**
What we said: "Both games (*GTA3* and *Vice City*) stand as simple marvels for the freedom they present to players."

FIVE

Need for Speed Underground

Live: **No**
Release: **11/03**
Score: **Nine**
What we said: "Where the game really shows its colors is in the level of customization..."

SIX

Sega GT Online

Live: **Yes**
Release: **01/04**
Score: **Nine**
What we said: "...GT takes advantage of Xbox Live's potential to deliver truly compelling multiplayer races."

SEVEN

Splinter Cell

Live: **No**
Release: **11/02**
Score: **Eight**
What we said: "...not an instant classic, *Splinter Cell* is a solid title and one of the finest Xbox games around."

EIGHT

Rainbow Six 3

Live: **Yes**
Release: **10/03**
Score: **Nine**
What we said: "The game achieves excellence through realism, feel, and a transparent user interface."

NINE

Prince of Persia: Sands of Time

Live: **No**
Release: **11/03**
Score: **Ten**
What we said: "...it's one of the best adventure games ever made, on any system."

TEN

Sonic Heroes

Live: **No**
Release: **01/04**
Score: **Eight**
What we said: "In classic *Sonic* fashion, *Heroes* looks spectacular... offers a return to classic *Sonic* form."

FAME...OR SHAME?



Breakdown

Live: **No** Release: **03/02** Score: **Nine**
Put simply, a breakthrough. We expect to see this game somewhere on this page in two months' time. You can help.

Auto Modellista

Live: **Yes** Release: **01/04** Score: **Three**
It's a part of a mediocre racer that shipped for PS2. Last year. Slippery when wet...well, actually, all of the time. Pretty, though.

TOP 10 U.K.

No time like now for nostalgia, larceny, and cars...

1 SONIC HEROES

Europeans heart hedgehogs.

2 GTA DOUBLE PACK

There's always time. For crime.

3 BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II

Like dungeons for dragons.

4 MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES

Or: Everything old is old again.

5 PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

Ride on.

6 LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFENSE

Vampires both suck and bite.

7 NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND

Feel the need.

8 TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX 3

Tom Clancy's blurb goes here.

9 FIFA 2004

More soccer, less rioting.

10 SEGA GT ONLINE

Great times.

TOP 10 JAPAN

From first-person pleasures...to porcelain treasures.

1 OTOGI: HYAKKI TOBATSU EMAKI

A great sequel to a great game.

2 PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

Kudos all around.

3 BREAKDOWN

Break down and buy it already.

4 HALO

Shooting crosses all cultures, apparently.

5 DEAD OR ALIVE 3

It was the breast of times.

6 DOA XTREME BEACH V-BALL

Winter in Japan can be mighty cold...

7 SONIC HEROES

The world still needs heroes.

8 UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Unreality does not bite.

9 CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: TOW

Have fun storming the castle.

10 HUNTER: THE RECKONING

Monsters: The Stabbing. See the movie!

Numbers courtesy of Media Create [m-creata.com]



FIRST LOOK

PIXEL PERFECT

Metal Slug 3 to call Xbox home

Subpar Sluggery
Korean company Playmore has since taken over ownership of the Metal Slug franchise; by most accounts, Metal Slug 4 and 5 proved far less than up to par.

In the canon of side-scrolling 2D shooters, few franchises have more credibility with the hardcore than the Metal Slug series. A whimsical mix of spruce-based aesthetic genius and bizarrely mundane Japanese stereotyping, the NeoGeo classic quickly became one of the system's defining titles, spawning four sequels, several ports, and many rabid fans. Now Metal Slug 3, perhaps the most widely celebrated title of the lot, is coming to

Xbox courtesy of its original publisher, SNK. The game features five enormous game stages, 10 new vehicles exclusive to Metal Slug 3, and a deliciously cross-pollinated story in which killer zombies can contaminate your characters and transform them into strange new creatures. Essentially, it's supposed to be a perfect frame-for-frame port of the original game, with the added bonus of Xbox Live leaderboard support—which, barring co-op online play, is all one



could ever ask for. Why such intense devotion? In these days of multimillion polygon character models and real-time reflection mapping, Metal Slug is simple, expertly refined 2D action—think Contra-style gameplay with impeccably expressive animation, hilarious character design, and some of the most chaotic action ever to grace a videogame. Lush urban landscapes are contrasted by truckloads of heavy weaponry in a bizarrely caricatured interpretation of war. All of which add up to what might be called the ultimate gamer's game. For Xbox users who have savored the Slug, an arcade-perfect port is colossal news, for those who have never played or owned it, the news couldn't come at a more perfect time. Metal Slug 3 ships this May. // More info at: www.snkplaymore.jp

News Bits
Tidbits of news for you and me

THE BOLLSH*T...

Act 1: Uwe Boll set to ruin House of the Dead 2 this summer. Talentless director Uwe Boll unzips his pants for yet another urination on the House of the Dead. Boll, known for ruining the popular light-gun shooter House of the

Dead, plans to ruin House of the Dead 2 this summer. The crappy sequel to the decidedly crappy original based on the decidedly uncrappy Sega videogame will feature a new urban setting and the same crappy director.

...KEEPS...

Act 2: Uwe Boll set to ruin BloodRayne Talentless director Uwe Boll, apparently not satisfied with having ruined such properties as House of the Dead and Alone in the Dark, is slated to savage Majesco's popular

BloodRayne in 2005. The film (thankfully lacking salient plot details) is slated to have a budget of approximately \$30 million. Says Boll, "BloodRayne is a dynamic, compelling, smart standard-bearer for the genre."

...ON COMIN'!

Act 3: Uwe Boll set to ruin even more stuff. In bad news that should surprise no one, talentless director Uwe Boll has signed deals with the appropriate parties to make movies based on the PC hit Dungeon

Siege and the console adventures Fear Effect and Hunter: The Reckoning. Satan is said to be pleased, while videogame mascot Crash Bandicoot is in hiding. His oversized hand-drawn pants said to be fairly well soiled.

X APPEAL

MS Japan pulls out all the stops

It still sells only 1,000 units per week, but Xbox has so far been making the most noise in Japan this year. Microsoft's Xbox PR team started off 2004 by exciting its piecemeal user base and the Japanese game media by giving them what they want—busty women clad only in bikinis.

The first of these promotions is also the most absurd: the DQA Beach in Hawaii contest. In March, Microsoft will send 50 lucky guys to a private Hawaiian beach to celebrate all things Dead or Alive with models wearing Tecmo's line of expensive bikini wear. On the day it announced the contest, Microsoft sent bikini-wearing models to the offices of Japan's biggest game-media companies. The play worked, as all the major game magazines and websites ran photos of their employees playing office volleyball with DQA hotties.

For the lonely Japanese males not traveling to Hawaii to play with real-life DQA models, Microsoft is offering an alternative. On March 25, Microsoft will release the Kasumi Blue Xbox bundle, which includes a full-sized "body pillow" adorned with DQA spokesmodel Kasumi. Are there any Japanese Xbox promotions not using sex appeal, then? The answer is yes, but like most of last year's Xbox promotions, few gamer much attention.

The most perplexing of the bunch was the Pure White Limited Xbox campaign. For ¥19,800 (roughly \$200), Japanese gamers could pick up an all-white Xbox with the buyer's name embossed on the console. "Limited" meant Microsoft manufactured only 1,000 Pure White consoles. The lot sold out in two days, and the campaign was over in the blink of an eye. Although Xbox has been heating up the winter with sexy promotions, it's clear that Microsoft can court only so many Dead or Alive fans. The firm's big challenge in 2004 will be to diversify its marketing and software lineup and end its complete dependence on Tecmo games. But will True Fantasy Live Online's elves, dragons, and sorcerers draw as much attention as the bouncing breasts of Dead or Alive? //

More info at:
www.xbox.com/ja-JP



Burnout 3 EA to put the pedal to the metal

To the joy of armchair racers everywhere, Electronic Arts has announced a partnership with U.K.-based Criterion Games to develop and publish Burnout 3, which is slated for a September release.

Those familiar with the superlative series' prior entries—Burnout and Burnout 2: Point of Impact—know what this announcement implies: blisteringly fast arcade racing with spot-on controls, fictional-but-close-enough-to-real cars, powersliding through crowded streets, and gloriously explicit collisions. And the gaming giant's guidance should ensure that this critically acclaimed franchise will finally receive the first-rate polish and sales push it deserves.

Flying in the face of such exacting racers as Project Gotham Racing and Sega GT, the Burnout games have always emphasized danger of the most reckless kind—namely, gaining boost by, among other things, hurtling the wrong way down the freeway. While XBN looks forward to the return of the criminally compelling crash mode, the promised "unique crash and burn" racing concept and "one-of-a-kind special effects engine" certainly sound promising, too. The only thing that's not smashing? Burnout 3 won't feature Xbox Live support. Ouch. //

More info at: www.eagames.com



WHAT WE SAID:

Burnout 2: POI // XBN 08

"Burnout 2: Point of Impact is a shocking blast of innovation for the genre...in terms of pure adrenaline and graphical splendor, there isn't a racer out there that can stack up against Burnout 2."

XBN RATING: 09



News Bits

Tidbits of news for you and me.

CRYSTAL CLEAR

Subdued, but stylish for sure: The United States, for whatever reason, is

the only region not to receive a special-edition Xbox this spring. In Europe, there's a special anniversary model in near-transparent "crystal white," which—like Japan's "pure white"—shipped in March. Or so they say.



LIVE...IN ASIA

SARS, bird flu can't stop Xbox Live rollout:

Right about now, Xbox gamers in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan are getting their game on-line. Microsoft plans to roll out its best and strongest asset—Xbox Live—to some of

Asia's best broadband-equipped regions. This could do wonders for the Xbox, which has suffered from anemic sales across Asia. As of press time, no pricing details were announced, but bundled deals seem like a sure bet.

FACT...OR FABLE?

Linhead's latest release: Release dates can be fickle things—just ask

the many fans awaiting the latest from game guru Peter Moynihan. The most recent word from developer Linhead's community diary? "Fable will be the first game from Linhead to be released this year." XBN's bet is on late summer.



Dead or Alive Ultimate is your link to the future of fighting games...

Experience Dead or Alive® 2, completely redesigned on a brand new engine.

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MTX: MOTOTRAX

PS2, XBOX

Think you've got what it takes? MTX: Mototrax offers the fastest motocross gaming experience that will have you accelerating around corners and flying through the air a teeth-rattling speeds. Launch into a gravity-defying inverted 360 before crossing the finish line to the roar of the crowd. Earn cold hard cash from contest wins and sponsorships. Use the money to modify your rider's attributes, purchase equipment upgrades or buy access to freeride environments complete with new goals and challenges. You can pursue your motocross goals on progress and ride 125cc and 250cc, 2 stroke bikes as well as 250cc and 450cc 4 stroke bikes from manufacturers like Suzuki and Yamaha.

The game features Travis Pastrana—legendary motocross, supercross and freestyle athlete—plus 12 other top pro riders, or you can take your skills online to compete against your friends or other live players to see who is king of the track!

BREAK OUT OF

SWEET CODES

NFL STREET
PS2, XBX, GC

Unlimited Turbo:
Press Start to pause game play, then hold L1 and press Circle, X, Right, Left (2), Up.

Unlockable Teams:
NFL Legends: Go to the NFL Challenge and complete the initial ladder.

X-ecutioners: Go to the NFL Challenge and complete the fourth ladder.

AFC West All-Stars: Go to NFL Challenge mode and complete the AFC West.

AFC East All-Stars: Go to NFL Challenge mode and complete the AFC East.

AFC North All-Stars: Go to NFL Challenge mode and complete the AFC North.

AFC South All-Stars: Go to NFL Challenge mode and complete the AFC South.

NFC West All-Stars: Go to NFL Challenge mode and complete the NFC West.

NFC East All-Stars: Go to NFL Challenge mode and complete the NFC East.

THE ORDINARY

BREAKOUT TRICKS

**PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME PS2, XBOX**

Slo-Mo Jump

- In a fight, all the enemies lose their blocks if you use a slo-mo. The ones that wouldn't allow you to jump over them now do.

Continuous Swing

- When swinging from pole to pole, keep the R1 button pressed down; this allows the Prince to continuously swing and link to the next pole.

Secret Passages

- It is necessary to closely observe the walls that do not seem solid. They are probably walls that can be broken and lead to the secret passages.

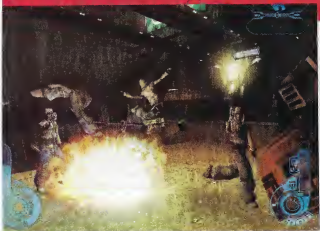
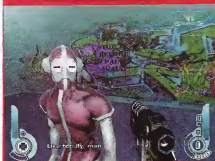
DARE TO LOG ON TO BUTTERFINGER.COM



FILLED WITH DREDD

FIRST LOOK

He's gruff, buff, and takes no guff!



◆ Courtesy of U.K.-based developer Rebellion, *Judge Dredd: Dredd Versus Death* takes place in a darkly comic version of the 22nd century. Mega City One is the setting, and it's overpopulated, overrun with crime, and generally a horrible place to live. Only the Judges—judge, jury, and executioner in one—keep the peace. And as lawman No. 1—the dour Judge Dredd—players are tasked with cleaning the streets.

The comic's camp approach to cops 'n' rubbers ensures that shooting will surely take precedence over what should be a fairly straightforward story line. And the comic's incredibly

successful long run ensures there's a rich array (more than 50 in all) of thieves, murderers, junkies, and other miscreants ready to collar. But series fans know that it's the Dark Judges—Death, Mortis, Fear, and Fire—that make Dredd's job so much, much more challenging than yours.

The game received fairly good scores for its gruesome gunplay and multiplayer modes upon its release in the U.K. earlier this year, but will its bleakly quirky world view and cultural nuances be as well received here? Trigger-happy Xbox owners can decide for themselves—the game is scheduled to hit store shelves in March. // More info at: www.dreddvsdeath.com

Grok drok?

Feeling Dredd-ful? Then brush up on your 22nd century cuss words—or word. In *Mega City One*, "drok" serves as the general catchall for all sorts of words that simply can't be mentioned here.

Comic banter

↳ Thousands of British gamers who grew up in the '70s and '80s could rely on one magazine to scare the living daylight out of their parents every week: 2000 A.D. It was home to the original Judge Dredd and his beat, the sprawling post-apocalyptic metropolis of Mega City One, filled with muggers, murderers, drug addicts, and corrupt officials.

For those who like to study these things at college, it was a dark reflection of the crime-ridden state



of punk-era Britain. For the rest, it was quite simply the most kick-ass comic they'd ever seen.

THAT WAS
THEN

see what's
NEXT



WHERE BUSINESS GETS FUN

CONFERENCE May 11-13 2004 | EXPOSITION May 12-14 2004
Los Angeles Convention Center

If you're in the business of games, you need to be at the
center of the games business — E³.
Register at www.e3expo.com

E³ is a trade event, and is not open to the general public. Only qualified industry professionals may attend. No one under 18 will be admitted. This policy is strictly enforced.
Consumers and game enthusiasts are encouraged to visit e3insider.com for a first-hand virtual look inside E³.

UK

CALL THE MANAGER

Americans dig sports games that put the player in the middle of the action. British gamers like to be the manager screaming from the sidelines: Eidos' *Championship Manager* is the king of soccer management, but Codemasters is bringing one of its own to the British Xbox—*LMA Manager*, due out in March, has a hyperdetailed player database and voice recognition support for cussing out players with the Xbox Communicator headset.

GERMANY

BUSTED, NOT BUSTED

Some poor exec at Ubisoft probably skated close to a heart attack on February 2, when *Far Cry* developer Crytek received an unexpected visit from the local police. A former employee, described by Crytek as a "disgruntled ex-intern," narked on the developer to cops in Coburg, Germany, accusing his old bosses of software piracy. A platoon of police computer experts searched the Crytek offices, but Ubisoft claims they turned up nothing.

ISRAEL

SINCEREST FORM OF FLATTERY?

Famous soundtrack often wind up recorded in unusual places, but Bungie might not be so flattered by the latest unauthorized use of the Halo soundtrack. Last fall, the magazine wound up backing a propaganda video aired on Palestinian television, accompanying some not-so-subtle imagery of Israeli soldiers and Palestinian children. It's been on the air since November, but it won't be for much longer—Microsoft has called in a lawyer strike.

LONDON CALLING: XBOX IN THE U.K.



Andy Hartup
News Editor
XBN

As is usually the case, we're again playing catch-up in the United Kingdom with all things Xbox. Owing to some legal technicalities between Rockstar and Sony, Europe has only just seen the eagerly anticipated *GTA Double Pack*, although a few lucky souls picked up copies before the official release date, thanks to some rule breaking by many major retailers around the country. Typical Rockstar controversy ensued as stores and publishers took to arms. Project Gotham Racing 2 also appeared about a week early—at least we don't fall behind when it comes to Xbox Live racing.

On the matter of Live racing, Microsoft has just released *RallySport Challenge 2* code, which will surely be the next big Live

phenomenon here in the United Kingdom. Sure, we don't get your American football, but we do understand what it means to trash a rally-tuned prestige sports car. *RallySport Challenge 2* is primed to put XSN firmly on the map over here in Europe. Other than dirty

motors, Microsoft has been fairly quiet, with only a tentative May release for UK RPG *Sudeki* and a "sometime this summer" release for Rare's *Kameo*. If you've ever experienced the British Rail, you know we're not big on keeping to deadlines over here.

In terms of games, Criterion Studios is busy beaver away on *Burnout 3*, and it's looking great. The question of whether EA will support Xbox Live with the title is still up in the air, but luckily, we're still content to trash the lot of you at *AGR2* for the moment. Reflections has given us a sneaky peek at the superb *DRIV3R*, but it's been quiet on the RPG front, with both *Intrepid* (B.C.) and *Big Blue Box* (*Fable*) keeping tight-lipped about the progress of their projects. Let's just say that a summer release is looking less and less likely than Simon Cowell starting up a karaoke bar. Has Peter Molyneux finally bitten off more than he can chew?

Speaking of Molyneux, just as we were going to print, the guru of UK gaming agreed to participate in an Xbox Live event in which gamers can take on the *Fable* team, including Molyneux himself. It's nice to know things are busy at the top //

FAST FACT

1.26
BILLION

Total U.K. sales—in British pounds—of entertainment software in 2003.

HONG KONG

DEFENESTRATOR!

Think you're serious about winning at videogames? You probably aren't as hardcore as a 15-year-old in Hong Kong who nearly killed himself after losing a game against his brother. After taking a little too much postmatch taunting, he jumped out a 20th-story apartment window...and survived, after bouncing off a street-level awning and landing on the pavement unhurt.

JAPAN

RELOADED

Who decided to make the Xbox such a killer 2D fighting system? First Capcom vs. SNK 2, then SVC Chaos, and now what might be the best of all. *Gilty Gear XX #Reload*, the top-of-the-line fighter from Arc System Works hits Japan at the end of April with Xbox-only single-player goodies and Xbox Live competition. SVC Chaos is already on its way Stateside, and *#Reload* will probably follow as well.

JAPAN

CASTLE OF WHO?

Alfa System's Shikigami no Shiro was one of the first Japanese Xbox games, so it's strange to see its sequel hit every console on the market (even Dreamcast) before Microsoft's. It's finally due out in Japan this spring, though—Shikigami no Shiro II brings the Xbox its requisite dose of supernaturally styled vertical shooting in April.

TOKYO TRIBE: XBOX IN JAPAN

After five hours of nonstop gaming, 45-year-old Gonta5 reclined on a tatami-laden floor for some rest. For most of the 50 attendees, soaking in as much hardcore Xbox gaming as possible was their only goal. But for Gonta5, his wife, and their four children, organizing and then participating in their third Xbox *taikai* (tournament) was exhausting.

But Gonta5 wasn't alone. He had plenty of help from Microsoft, which sent Xbox personnel, boxes full of Xbox games, and over a dozen televisions and Xboxes down to Osaka for the all-day event. Factoring in the cost of the venue, meals, prizes, shipping, and transportation, Microsoft spent several thousand dollars to treat 50-plus gamers to a nice Saturday.

FAST FACT

431
THOUSAND

The number of Xboxes sold in Japan as of January 18, 2004.

But such is the life of Xbox gamers in Japan—they are gaming courtesans of sorts, with the richest patron of all, Microsoft. Just two weeks prior to the event, Microsoft mailed out the Xbox Live Premium Box to all Live subscribers in celebration of the service's first-year anniversary. The slickly designed gift box included several promotional booklets, a *True Fantasy Live Online* calendar, a

demo disc, and other goodies as thanks for signing up for the service.

According to Microsoft, the courtship is far from over. Xbox senior manager Masahiro Koide hinted that the Live gift box was the first of many presents to be sent out to Xbox owners. And Gonta5 and Xbox PR manager Shigeo Tatsumi already have an April date set for the next *taikai*.

"This kind of community is very important to Microsoft's current strategy," notes Famitsu Xbox editor Hideaki Endo, who took a bullet train from Tokyo for the event. "Sony and Nintendo sponsor nothing like this." And from the standpoint of Gonta5 and the handful of Xbox fans in Japan, many wouldn't have it any other way. Lunch, Halo tournaments, and boxes full of Xbox games to play—all on Microsoft's tab—mean more to the average gamer than worries about the firm's market-share woes. But with stagnant Xbox sales, how long can Microsoft's courtship of a few dozen gamers possibly last? //



Ryan Payton
Writer
Tokyo, Japan



W'HAPPEN?

It's an XBN flashback, dude! Check it out...

➤ Out with the old and in with the new, or so they say. In case you passed over the final issue of XBN version 01, here's what you missed...



CES-POOL

The focus of the latest CES in Las Vegas: Microsoft's Media Center Extender technology, which will enable gamers

to use an Xbox as an extension of their digital library. Sounds good, which, sadly, couldn't be said for the 5.1 surround sound speaker system.



CULTURE CLUB

But it wasn't all crass commercialism—XBN "Banged the Machine" at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San

Francisco and rustle up every baseball game scheduled for the year (and yes, MLB Slugfest: Loaded's cover boy is Sammy Sosa, not Jim Edmonds).



STAR STRICKEN

XBN's Star Crossed feature shed first light on two new LucasArts Star Wars games—both set in the first-person

perspective—Republic Commando and Battlefront. One's a bit like Rainbow Six, and the other bears a striking resemblance to Battlefield 1942...



MORE BANG FOR YOUR BOX

But the cream of last issue's crop was XBN's X04 story, featuring all the best games slated for

2004. Brawny blockbusters-to-be like Halo 2 and Doom 3 got their adoration, as did Phantom Dust, B.C., Fable, Full Spectrum Warrior, and Silent Hill 4.



SURPRISINGLY SOLID

XBN was pleasantly surprised by the slew of solid review scores, topped by James Bond

007: Everything or Nothing, Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon, and the criminally underselling Beyond Good & Evil and Prince of Persia.

CALENDAR



05

Matrix Revolutions comes out on DVD tomorrow. Which pill do you plan to...oh, never mind.



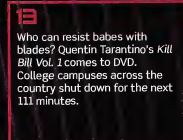
06

Get your best smack n'ally for *NBA Ballers* or go Wild West gunslinging in *Red Dead Revolver*.



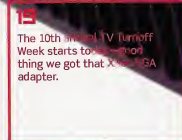
12

The top 10 reasons to watch *The Late Show*? David Letterman turns 57 today. Well, that's one reason.



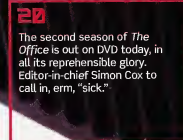
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Who can resist babes with blades? Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill Vol. 1* comes to DVD. College campuses across the country shut down for the next 111 minutes.



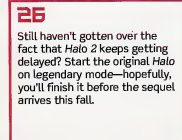
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The 10th annual TV Turnoff Week starts tomorrow. The only thing we got that XBN NBA adapter.



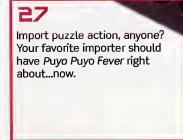
20

The second season of *The Office* is out on DVD today, in all its reprehensible glory. Editor-in-chief Simon Cox to call in, erm, "sick."



26

Still haven't gotten over the fact that Halo 2 keeps getting delayed? Start the original Halo on legendary mode—hopefully, you'll finish it before the sequel arrives this fall.



27

Import puzzle action, anyone? Your favorite importer should have *Puyo Puyo Fever* right about...now.

THE MONTH AHEAD ON XBOX APRIL 2004



07

Take home Jennifer Garner...or, at least, the limited-edition Sidney Bistow poster packed in with *Atlas* preorder. Huh? You didn't preorder? Then maybe the new *Hitman: Contracts* is more up your alley.

01

Rush to the store to be first in line for *Halo 2*, *Fable*, *B.C.*, *GTA4*: *Tutse*, *Sanctuary*, *Ghost*, and *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*!

02

Realize yesterday's release date was just a fleeting dream and blow off some steam with a flick—*Hellboy* opens



03

Jesse James shot in the back in 1882. Ouch!

04



10



16



18



18



21



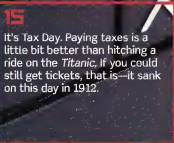
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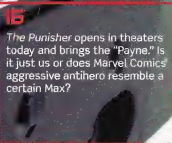


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15

It's Tax Day. Paying taxes is a little bit better than hitching a ride on the *Titanic*. If you could still get tickets, that is—it sank on this day in 1912.

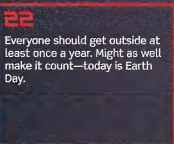


16

The Punisher opens in theaters today and brings the "Payne." Is it just us or does Marvel Comics' aggressive antihero resemble a certain Max?

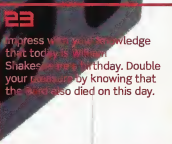


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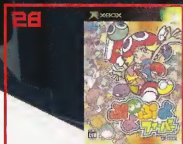
22

Everyone should get outside at least once a year. Might as well make it count—today is Earth Day.

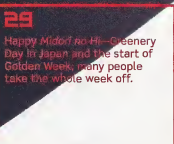


23

Impress with your knowledge that today is William Shakespeare's birthday. Double your reward by knowing that the actor also died on this day.



28



29

Happy Midori no Hi—Greenery Day in Japan and the start of Golden Week: many people take the whole week off.



30



FIRE FOR HIRE

LucasArts aims to upset the Axis of Evil

➔ Sadly, the soldier of fortune made famous by the late singer-songwriter Warren Zevon in "Roland the Headless Thompson Gunner" will not be a playable character in LucasArts' *Mercenaries*. Instead, the action game will feature three totally headless mercenaries fighting in a futuristic North Korea.

A third-person action game, *Mercenaries* (its working title) seems to be an ultraviolent third-person explosion-fest. Mercs can pick and choose sides, working for either the North Koreans, Chinese, Russian Mafia, or United Nations.

In a semi-unique twist of gameplay, *Mercenaries* presents players with a 52-card deck. The cards represent a rogue, a target to be captured or killed. With each mission, the player is given a card and asked to

gather intelligence leading to another target. Completing missions and eliminating targets equals cold, hard cash, take care of the mysterious figure emblazoned on the ace of spades, and you'll be able to claim supreme bragging rights.

Obviously over the top in its approach, *Mercenaries* appears to play the demented cousin to the more sane and sober *Full Spectrum Warrior*. Everything in the game, LucasArts claims, can be stolen, used, piloted, blown up, or otherwise interacted with.

Early intelligence reports indicate that the game holds 52 missions and a complement of more than 30 weapons and 20 vehicles. Sources close to the crumb say some of the vehicles can be hijacked—helicopters can be assaulted while in midair, with the attacking mercenary leaping into the air, grabbing on to

the chopper's rungs, flipping up into the cockpit, and relieving the pilot of both his seat and his life.

Still early in its development stage, neither LucasArts nor developer Pandemic has commented on whether the game will have any multiplayer or Xbox Live play. Since *Mercenaries* seems to scream for some sort of shared experience, it seems more than likely that the game will be endowed with such before its release this fall. //

News Bits

Tidbits of news for you and me



PHANTOM PRES.

Kevin Bachus joins Infimum Labs, creator of the much-maligned Phantom videogame console, has received a shot of credulity in

the form of key industry figure Kevin Bachus, who has signed on as president and COO. Previously, Bachus franchises as James Bond 007, Harry Potter, and Lord of the Rings, is



FELINE FUN

EA to publish

Catwoman game: Electronic Arts, publishers of such licensed multicore hit franchises as James Bond 007, Harry Potter, and Lord of the Rings, is

set to do it again with a series of games based on the Warner Bros. film *Catwoman*, slated for a summer release. The movie stars Halle Berry as the clawed crime-fighter.

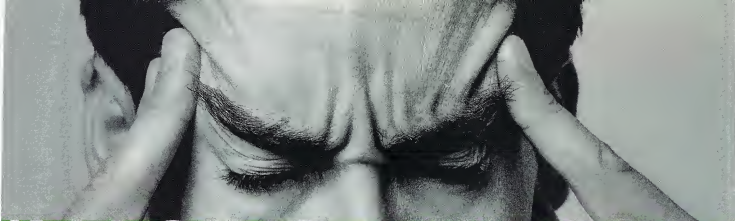


READY? FIGHT!

EA, Marvel Comics form superteam:

Not satisfied with having signed just about every license in the known world, Electronic Arts is banding together with Marvel Comics to develop a new line of fighting games. Heroes from the

Marvel universe, who have previously appeared in brawlers from Capcom and Activision, will do battle with as-of-yet unnamed, original characters created by EA. New comic books introducing these characters are also planned.



IMAGINE A WORLD



RUN BY GAMERS,
FOR GAMERS,
ABOUT GAMERS.

WE DO.

COMPUTER
GAMING
WORLD

THE MAGAZINE FOR
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PICK ONE UP ON NEWSSTANDS EVERYWHERE.

"All plans fall to sh*t when the bullets start flying..."



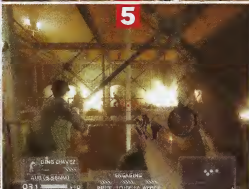
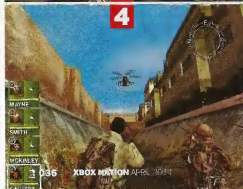
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2
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3
6



POP QUIZ

We name their influences. They tell us if we're right....

XBN shows six slightly brown wargames to the director of THQ's *Full Spectrum Warrior*, Wil Stahl.

1 America's Army [2002]

U.S. Army PC

WS: That's America's Army.

XBN: This game was crafted as a recruiting tool. Might *Full Spectrum Warrior* be used in a similar way?

WS: I'm sure the Army is very much in tune with that and would like for that to happen—they're very savvy about their image. They are really excited about FSW going out, only because of all the games in the market—it really represents what it is to be a soldier.

XBN: What was the Army's perception of what you had to offer? Was there a specific disconnect regarding games?

WS: They would come to us with things that they thought were easy, that were insanely impossible. And then they would come to us with things they thought couldn't be done, and it was insanely easy. I had a four-star general ask me, "Can we—in the game—change the weapons of the soldiers?" And I was like, "Whoa, slow down, no one has ever done that before in a game!"

2 Army Men [1998]

3DO PC

WS: Is that... *Army Men*?

XBN: Like *Army Men*, FSW is similar to an RTS, but the player isn't required to manage resources. More like a real-time combat simulator...

WS: I personally have had experience with blending genres. It seems that all I ever do is blur the lines between what kind of game this is. FSW is, when you look at it on paper, an RTS, but when you play it, it's an action game. For marketing, it's an incredible blend. (Pandemic's) *Battlezone* was critically acclaimed, but it didn't really reach a mass audience. We taken a lot of lessons away from that.

3 Black Hawk Down [2003]

Nova Logic PC

WS: That is *Black Hawk Down*. I loved the demo, but I never played the game.

XBN: *Black Hawk Down* was criticized for its linear design. With FSW, how were you challenged to come up with creative and strategic scenarios?

WS: Again, we were always down by what's authentic, what would really do. And at some point, you hit the glass ceiling, where you go, "OK, it's not going to be fun." You have to make abstractions, so we would make them in small increments, 'cause we tried to stay close to what our roots were.

So the challenge is when we say on the box, "The most authentic military sim you have ever seen." The first time that doesn't happen, they are going to think, "This is a sucky game." But still, it's as authentic as you are going to get in a military game.

Games like these don't really get that deep, because you are "in" the game. If you were "in" FSW, you'd be spending a lot of time trying to take care of your own skin, and a lot of the controls are dedicated to your own input: jumping, running, firing. You don't have anything left for controlling the squad.

XBN: This game was analogous to a safari ride through Mogadishu. How on rails would you say you are in FSW?

WS: Because the game is about flanking, we had to give you opportunities to do that. In order to achieve that, you need to have one team get in a stalemate—and if you don't have another way to address it, what's the point of having two teams? It's really about choosing your cover best.

Also, there's anywhere from three to four ways to take the street under fire, there's anywhere from three to four ways to approach a man in cover. Even though it's the same situation, different players are going to approach it differently. "I want to use smoke this time." Fifteen minutes later, you don't have the smoke [grenade], so it changes your tactics. So, "I'm going to use suppression this time." but the payoff still allows for different styles of play.

4 Conflict Desert Storm [2002]

Gotham Games GC/PC/PS2/XB

WS: That's *Conflict Desert Storm*, which is what some people assume FSW is, but it's probably the exact opposite. I'm not saying CDS is a bad game; I actually like the second one. But it has no foundation in Army principles.

5 Rainbow Six 3 [2003]

Ubisoft GC/PS2/XB

WS: That's *Rainbow Six 3*.

XBN: Currently the most popular console shooter, much of *Rainbow Six 3*'s popularity stems from its head-to-head play on Xbox Live.

WS: Right. FSW goes head-to-head would need a new gameplay paradigm—we would need new maps and something to fight over. And we just didn't have time in our budget.

We haven't even really done any research into what the game would play like. Because the Army didn't want soldiers fighting soldiers; it was always soldiers fighting what

they call "asymmetries"—unorganized, loosely scattered enemies. The enemies they encounter don't tend to work in the combined force way that they do. All plans fail to sh*t when bullets start flying, but asymmetries are particularly vulnerable to a kind of breakdown in morale and coordination. So we never required them, because we never had a precedent for soldier versus soldier.

But one of the first things that would be problematic is that FSW would really reward the camper. Because it's always better to just sit and wait, then go on the offensive. It's just the nature of warfare. So we would have to do a lot of balancing and figuring out... I mean, it's not easy, but you can do it by making sure you have objectives that keep you moving forward.

But we're really thinking that when we get to look at the next project cycle, it would be just as compelling as any other game. I mean, you're looking at the fourth iteration of this now. So they really got it nailed, polished, and honed, and they know their audience, and it's doing very well. Rightly so.

Whereas FSW is really trying to be the cornerstone here—we're not really sure where we are going to hit. And who's going to really respond.

6 Battlefield 1942 [2002]

Electronic Arts PC

WS: That is *Hidden and Dangerous*. No, that's *Closed Combat*. No, that's *Battlefield 1942*.

XBN: It's the most popular team-based military sim at the moment.

WS: *Counter-Strike* in WWII?

XBN: Well, with massive areas and large-scale combat. Could you envision an FSW game with, say, 16 four players each controlling a squad of four?

WS: Yeah, we have big plans for stuff like that. That was the Army's original idea—they were really interested in a massive online simulation because it's cost effective, it's a lot cheaper to run more games virtually.

We're looking at FSW as an umbrella license if it's effective. Where we can still continue that traditional gameplay that it establishes, but in the way that *Splinter Cell* came out of the Tom Clancy license. We could do a first-person shooter based on the FSW license...

XBN: How about a first-person sneaking game instead?

WS: Adventure guys don't sneak. They kill people and break sh*t. //

ABOUT: POP QUIZ

Each month, XBN pops the quiz on an Xbox game designer. We show our guest a series of screenshots and let him or her identify the game. We then ask them to comment on that game's relevance—if there is any—to their own work. By discussing various external influences, we hope to gain insight into their own creative processes.

ABOUT: WIL STAHL

Before serving as director for the commercial release of *Full Spectrum Warrior*, Wil Stahl worked on the Army edition of that game. Prior to that, Wil helped develop Activision's PC games *Battlezone* and *Battlezone II: Combat Commander*.

ABOUT: PANDEMIC STUDIOS

Pandemic Studios was founded in 1998 by a group of ex-Activision designers, following the completion of *Battlezone* and *Dark Reign* (PC). Based in sunny Westwood, CA, Pandemic currently has four titles in the works and operates with a staff of nearly 150 members. They also operate an Australian office with a staff of about 30 to 40 employees.

CONNECTED

We came, we saw, we surfed



1 Xbox Play Together (U.K.)

URL: www.xboxemea.com/playtogether/

Have you been to Xbox.com lately? Not very sexy, is it? Informative, yes, but definitely not sexy. Mouse over to Xbox's snazzy, squiggly little site to play a quick game of Freddy Bear Mayhem, take the Play Test, or print out and assemble your own 1:18 scale Master Chief.

3 World Chess Boxing Org.

URL: www.wcbo.com

According to the World Chess Boxing Organization, "The WCBO trains people to be the No. 1 thinking sport and the No. 1 fighting sport and the combination of both." Think Chessboxing: 3000's toughest. It's wearing boxing gloves. Oh wait, maybe that's not what they meant.



2 GameDesignX

URL: www.gamedesignx.com

So you want to be a game designer? EA's Chris Remington (*LOTR: Returns of the King*)'s personal website—while long overdue for a news update—has tips and pointers for gametweakers in training. Features plenty of articles, links, bios of some of the industry's best, and suggestions for getting a solid start in the right direction.

4 tokidoki v2.0

URL: www.tokidoki.it/

Home to the delightfully addictive Supercell's *Sushi Race* Flash game, tokidoki 2.0 is a clever, colorful, and completely captivating website featuring the collected works of Italian Graphic Designer Samuele Leggio. Flippant, ironic, and just a little bit erotic, to boot.



Xbox セット! コンピュータゲーム18種類より、必ず買にも4種追加が選べます。

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WEIRD AND WONDERFUL

Microsoft and Aoki's Pizza have partnered to drive home the message that pizza is as American as apple pie—or, for that matter, Xbox. The Xbox Campaign Set lets hungry Japanese mix and match up to four delicious flavors...and gives them a chance to win an Xbox, too.



Egg and Tuna Pizza

We like eggs. We like tuna. And most of the time, we really like pizza. But mostly, we like to enjoy them separately.



Mochi Pizza

Mochi, for those of you who don't already know, are gummy little cakes made from rice flour. They're...carb-o-rific!

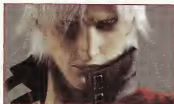


Salmon, Squid, and Shrimp Pizza

It's funny 'cause it's true!

CLONE WARS!

An XBN investigation: Are they from the same fertile imagination? Or simply from the same womb?...



DANTE

Devil May Cry's Dante is part man, part hellspawn, and all badass. He likes his set of matching 45s, Ebony and Ivory, investigating the paranormal; and the color red.



SOLUS

Breakdown baddie Solus is part pretty boy, part machine, and all badass. He likes stating the obvious, calculating his foes' odds of survival, and casting aside his enemies with disdain.



ON THE DL

Titles featuring Xbox Live downloadable content



ARMED AND DANGEROUS

DOWNLOAD: Summer Home mission

WHY IT'S COOL: The thought of ogres raiding Uly's drawers full of unmentionables makes us angry.

LucasArts says: "The King's troops are looking for payback and are determined to destroy Uly's lovely summer home, and it is your mission to prevent the ogres from destroying her idyllic house. If they succeed, Uly would have nowhere to summer and would wind up living on the streets.

Ogres overheard saying: "The mentality of this petite bourgeoisie gives us an unscreatchable itch on our moist hairy of areas...She has no right to own a summer home."



SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY

DOWNLOAD: Download Package #4

WHY IT'S COOL: The thrill of taking down Luftwaffe pilots in the best machines the Nazis had to offer.

LucasArts says: "Xbox Live is a great way for us to expand the player's experience. We made sure there was a very solid framework for the new content to naturally plug in to. All the new airplanes and missions that we release add wonderful new depth to the product."

Nazi pilot overheard saying: "Ze American pig-dogs have no chance at stopping us from our quest to make ze world just like Las Vegas!"



// COUNTER-STRIKE: Two new urban battlefield maps are now available. Take on all mercenaries in the Inferno and Office maps.

// ESPN BASKETBALL: A roster update from November 2003 is now available.

// MECHASALUT: Two new game types and three new maps are available as premium content with a price tag of \$4.99.



// TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: ISLAND THUNDER: Three new missions are being prepared for release very shortly. Riverbed, Roadblock, and Tank are on their way...

// SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY: Package #4 (see above), downloads include a new plane (He162), a new two-player mission, and a new camo scheme for P-51 and B-17.

POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE: TRUE STORIES FROM XBOX LIVE

Whatup XBN. Do any of y'all play Rainbow Six 3 on Live? I'm on some funny sh't on that.

For example, the other day I was playing R53 on the Venezuela map, and there was this kid called 'Slayer of Games' on there. He sounded like he was 10 years old, so I decided to bug him. I asked him, "Yo, Slayer, are you a girl?" He was like, "Go! sound like a girl? In his 10 year-old voice, so I told him, "Awh! Where you live, baby?" He got all pissed, talking

sh't on banning me and sh't. But I kept on him. I was bawling at him like he was a girl, man, giving him my whole A1 B. Sure game, big of lover man. (If he was really 10yo, how old have youn maffine.) After a while, the poor k* just started blikin'. I think I think made him cry. It some sh't. At one point, I started singing all the lyrics to "Fantasy Girl" (remember that old Stevie B. joint?). I saw the whole song, man. It was p'fect us.

But yo, seriously, holla at me. I do sh't like this all the time. Y'all should record it, cuz it's ridiculous how I come at these kids. I'm surprised I've never been banned. I guess they're feeling me. So word! Holla at your currrrrry!

Sincerely,
Laurence Dominguez
Red Hook, Brooklyn, NYC
Gamertag: undisclosed

LIVE

WHERE XBOX LIVE CALLS HOME APRIL 2004

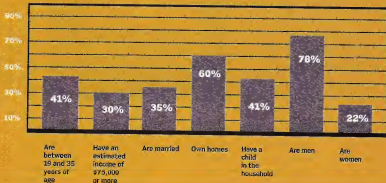
LIVE AND DIRECT

Welcome to the next generation videogame magazine, built for the next generation of videogaming: Xbox Live.

→ The mantra is, itself, nothing new—indeed, “online is the future of videogaming.” But Xbox Live represents the first time that the technical back end (high-speed, dedicated service) and the creative front end (forward-thinking games) have joined to deliver the kinds of experiences that we’ve been dreaming of for years. Live it up.

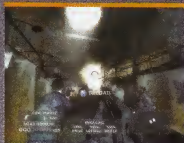
NOW PLAYING

Know thine enemy...



Clock prime time on Xbox Live is 8:00 p.m. PST. The overall peak usage time is 7:30-9:00 p.m. PST.

TOP 10 MOST-PLAYED XBOX LIVE TITLES



01 **TOM CLANCY'S
RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2**
BY EA GAMES

02 **PROJECT GOTHAM
RACING 2**
BY POLYCOMPUTER SYSTEM

03 **COUNTER-
STRIKE**
BY VALVE CORP/VALVE CORP

04 **MECH
ASSAULT**
BY AEROMAX/DAVE GILLES

05 **TOM CLANCY'S
RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2**
BY EA GAMES

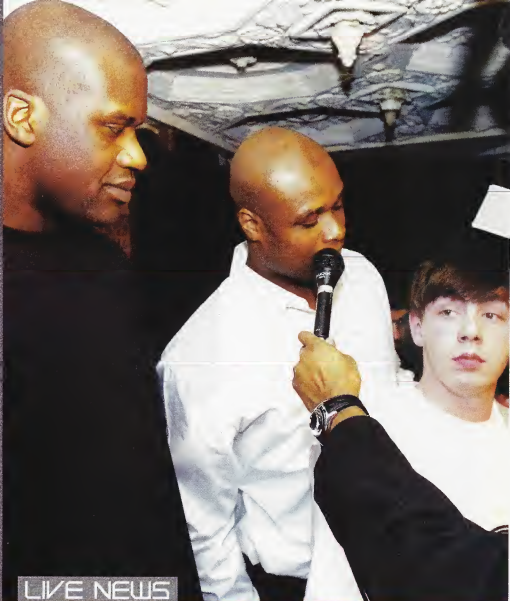
06 **CRIMSON SKIES:
FIGHTING TO REVENGE**
BY MARY ZIEGLER/DAVE GILLES

07 **ESPN
NFL FOOTBALL**
BY EA GAMES

08 **RETURN TO CASTLE
WOLFENSTEIN**
BY CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

09 **LINKS
2004**
BY HUBERSON/DAVE GILLES

10 **TOP
SPIN**
BY MICROSOFT GAMES STUDIO



LIVE NEWS

\$25K RICHER

XSN and a young man named David prove that the world still needs champions...



Sunset Boulevard is Mecca for celebrities, wannabes, and every shade of hipster known to man. But at the House of Blues on February 12, blitz took the backseat as an elite group of cyberathletes fought for \$25,000 and a shot at virtual fame in Microsoft's first-ever XSN Sports World Championship. The final round, a single game of *NBA Inside Drive 2004*, played out in front of a crowd of reporters and sports stars—including the only man in the world who still games with his original supersized Xbox controller: Kazaan himself, Shaquille O'Neal.

In the end, underdog David Muellertweiss, a 19-year-old student from the University of North Carolina, took

the trophy from tournament vet Nat "The Great" Barrick. It was an incredibly close match, decided in the final seconds by a few clutch free throws.

So what's David's big secret? "I just play online, but not too much," he told Xbox Nation during his postgame celebration. "About 20 hours a week." And though Los Angeles did well by young Mr. Muellertweiss, the champ wasn't about to pander to the home team. "Everybody uses the Lakers except for me...I use the Kings," he smiled. "Usually the Kings beat the Lakers." Fortunately, Shaq was out of earshot. Bit of advice, Dave: Don't pass off an 8-foot-tall dude, especially if he knows Shaq-Fu. //

QUOTED:

**ANTHONY
WALKER DALLAS
MAVERICKS**

"The atmosphere today had the intensity of an NBA playoff game. The players, especially David, proved they could compete at the highest level with their reputations and \$25,000 on the line."

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New York, NY
Brooklyn, NY
Boston, MA
Columbus, OH

Detroit, MI
Indianapolis, IN
Louisville, KY
Chicago, IL
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**ELECTRONIC
GAMING**
ENTERTAINMENT

* Prize money based on total registrations.

MEDIA FRENZY

Convergence. Set-top boxes. Here's a guide to the next step in home entertainment

Microsoft is taking another stab at media convergence, this time with the Media Center PC as the focal point for all your electronic entertainment needs. Since we humans typically use our computers for some things (like downloading music files) and our TVs for others (like watching porno—er, movies), sometimes it's frustrating not to be able to access one from the other.

Well, imagine being able to take that special collection of pictures and movies you have on your PC and watch it on your TV from the comfort of your couch...yeaaaaah. Now imagine having TiVo functionality accessible from multiple sources, including portable sources for, say, watching *The Simpsons* on the go. This is Microsoft's goal: the flexible sharing of your media. Here's how it works.



3



2



1

TRANSMITTABLE MEDIA

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO WATCH TODAY?

- Live TV signals (including TiVo-style pause functionality)
- Recorded TV shows
- DVD movies
- Music files
- Movie files
- Pictures
- Internet Radio

XBOX MEDIA CENTER EXTENDER KIT (XMBEK)

One DVD and a brand-new remote will allow you to install the Media Center Extender software onto your Xbox hard drive, allowing it to function as a full MCE.

1 WINDOWS MEDIA CENTER PC (MCPC)

This is essentially a Windows XP box loaded up with the hardware necessary to deliver TiVo-style TV recording, pausing, and scheduling, as well as a consistent interface for music, movies, and pictures. Because its core is Windows XP Pro, it can be your main working or gaming computer, while at the same time serving TV shows, movies, pictures, and music to any MC Extenders (MCE) around your house. Without this, none of the MCEs will matter, since they pull all their information from the MCPC.

2 MEDIA CENTER EXTENDERS (MCE)

These are network devices that have enough hard-drive space and decoding ability to pull data from a Media Center PC and use it wherever the devices are located. Your TV can be an MCE, you can purchase a stand-alone MCE box, or you can use a special kit that allows your Xbox to be an MCE...or all of the above.

3 PORTABLE MEDIA CENTERS

Think supersized iPod. This is a portable audio/video box you can use to store and play music, movies, and TV shows, as well as view pictures. Naturally, it uses the same familiar Media Center interface.

MEDIA CENTER CONTENDERS

SONY PSX

Take a PS2 and slap on a 160GB hard drive, a TV tuner, DVD-RW recording ability, and some audio/video playback abilities, and what do you get? The love child of a PS2 and a TiVo, and an \$800 price tag.

XBOX MUSIC MIXER

If making your Xbox into a jukebox on the cheap is your goal, try using this. The XMM pulls music from your PC or CDs and lets you play it on your Xbox in a karaoke mode, a playlist mode, or while watching 3D visualizations.

UNOFFICIAL XBOX MEDIA CENTER (XBMC)

A group of intrepid coders whipped up its own media center. Unsanctioned (and requiring a modded Xbox), XBMC can play almost any media type directly from your PC or the Xbox DVD drive and HD.

SHADOW DANCER

Splinter Cell online strategies—straight from the horse's mouth

Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow lets players experience, for the first time, the thrill of stealth action against another living, breathing human being. Whether you play as a mercenary or a spy, the numerous gadgets, moves, and weapons available let you create your own strategies to achieve your goals. To excel in this competitive environment, the best advice is to play through the tutorial in order to master all the character's moves and gadgets—as well as to properly explore the levels and learn the objectives' locations and all of the paths throughout the map. For those who want a few tricks of the trade, Ubisoft's crack team of testers has already came up with a series of useful strategies...

PLAYING AS A MERCENARY:

- 1** Use your spy trap! Once spies are located, the spy trap makes it infinitely easier to coordinate a proper ambush.
- 2** Place as many spy traps and wall mines as possible in a narrow area, which becomes a real "vault." (Added bonus: it looks amazing in thermal vision!)
- 3** If a spy is located in a canalization, toss a grenade and tell the other mercenaries to wait at the other end—success is virtually guaranteed.
- 4** Shoot out all of the lights in an area and then use EMF. Vision of mercenaries will need to use their goggles to see and will be spotted.
- 5** In a location where spies can access ceilings, use your phos, hot grenades. You will be able to get spies at all times through ceilings with your EMF.
- 6** Always remember that, if you're clicking the left thumb stick always you to do a quick 180-degree turn. Using the touch pad can be a lot of handy all around you in a split second.
- 7** Using the map-tracking vision mode allows you to follow.

PLAYING AS A SPY:

- 1** After sticky-shocking a mercenary, throw a sticky cam at his feet and release the gas. The mercenaries won't bother you for a little while...
- 2** Throw a snare-alarm on a wall (or a detector); it's the perfect way to create an ambush!
- 3** The "mercenary sandwich" tactic: As one spy runs toward the mercenary and drops a flash bang, the second stays primed and ready to grab the merc from behind...
- 4** Use mercs' mines against them: Shoot mines if mercenaries come near them, or even better, shoot and detonate mines when mercenaries are placing them.
- 5** "Wait of Smoke": When a spy is taking an objective, the second one throws a smoke grenade in front of the doors to access the room.
- 6** Set one spy on the top of a box. When a mercenary passes by, the other spy shocks him; the first spy can then easily drop on him and knock him out.
- 7** When a spy is ready to take an objective, the other one triggers an alarm at the opposite end of the map. Panic is guaranteed for the mercenaries.

XBOX LIVE FOR DUMMIES

XBN's official guide to a prosperous online experience

4 THINGS YOU NEED TO GET ONLINE



1.

BROADBAND INTERNET ACCESS

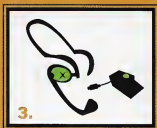
Xbox does not accept 14.4K dial-up. Most ISPs work swimmingly—with AOL's high-speed cable service being one of the few exceptions. You'll also need a router, if you want your Xbox to coexist with your PC online.



2.

A CREDIT CARD

Xbox does not accept personal checks or gold shillings, so make sure you have your credit card handy. We'd make a joke here about Master Chief never leaving home without his assault rifle right now, if we were so inclined, but, fortunately, we're not.



3.

AN XBOX LIVE STARTER KIT

These come in various flavors and sizes, but 70 bucks will get you an Communicator headset, a one-year subscription to Xbox Live, and a copy of the MechWarrior-inspired shoot-a-thon Mech Assault. (Note: It's 50 bucks a year after that.)



4.

THE ABILITY TO ENTER DATA INTO YOUR XBOX

Name, home address, credit card info...a few more things and you're ready to roll. Literally, 10 minutes and you're done dealing with it forever. Simple. Easy. Delicious. Xbox Live.

4 THINGS YOU CAN DO ON XBOX LIVE



1.

TALK TO YOUR FRIENDS

It's an easy way to talk to your pals, without posky things like "telephones" or "phone bills." There's an ever-so-slight lag at times, but this is the best way we know of to cheat the system.



2.

MAKE NEW FRIENDS (AND ENEMIES)

Making friends is easy... especially when you can't see them or be seen yourself. It may sound creepy, but anonymous voice chat is a whole new way to socially interact. (You freak.)



3.

DOWNLOAD NEW CONTENT

New levels, scenarios, items, and characters are available every week—just check www.xboxlive.com for daily scoops. Alternatively, check out XBN's On the DL (page 43) for monthly updates.



4.

PLAY THE GAMES

Duh. With over 70 games and 750,000 subscribers online as of January 1, 2004, the Xbox Live community will keep on growing. If you haven't joined already, now is the time—just be sure to leave your expletive filter at home.

XBN EDITOR CHALLENGE

Day or night, rain or shine, land or sea, the Xbox Nation editors are here to accept your feeble challenges. We promise to beat, maim, shoot, outplay, outrun, or outdance any and all comers; this is not a threat, but rather a grim reality.

Tread lightly, ye contestants.

// CHE CHOU

Gamertag: **cheXBN**

"Any of you F*cking pigs move and I'll execute every motherf*cking last one of you!"

// GREG ORLANDO

Gamertag: **Motiv**

"Ask for Achmed and get 20 percent off—off your life, that is!"

// EVAN SHAMMOON

Gamertag: **Giantmecha**

"Less typing, more sniping."

// DAVID CHEN

Gamertag: **RastaGundam**

"Can't we all just... get... uh..."

// SIMON COX

Gamertag: **Cox**

"Forsooth, young padawan, for I shall train ye in the art of the headshot."

// CINDY LUM

Gamertag: **XXXbn**

"For a good time, ping me online."

// ANDREW BURWELL

Gamertag: **Andrew XBN**

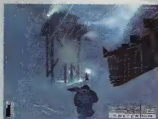
"I like driving games."

// ANDREW MENDOZA

Gamertag: **BeatsNico**

"The revolution will not be televised."

Note: Xbox Nation does not accept responsibility for the hurt feelings and/or poor win-loss records of its victims.



< "I think controversy has been the foundation of the success of the *Hitman* series," points out *Contracts* game director Jacob Andersen. "If you want to make a hit today, [you've] got to seriously consider being edgy and walking the fine lines of morality. If you don't dare to do this as a developer, then you can be certain that the players will turn their heads elsewhere because the availability of quality games is so vast." Perhaps an exaggeration (read: *The Sims*), but not entirely; how else does one account for the fact that mediocre products like *True Crime* so vastly outsold classics of the form like *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* this past holiday season?

Judging by Xbox Nation's three-level hands-on demonstration, these "fine lines of morality" that

Andersen refers to are significantly more reminiscent of 16-lane highways in the *Hitman* universe. Enemies are punctured with handy fireplace pokers and pool cues. Blood flows like tap water, coagulating into crimson puddles on floors and leaving Rorschach-like splashes on bare white walls. In one particularly heartwarming meat locker/nightclub scene, a dilapidated hallway is lined with bloody pig-mask-wearing prostitutes riding their well-dressed customers. (Absurdly enough, U.S. producer Clayton Palma points out that the only chance of the ESRB tagging the game with an Adults Only rating would be because of partial nudity and sexual content; excessive bloodletting is, apparently, a nonissue.) Whether this approach is entirely due to

market pressures is difficult to say, but it has indeed become the game's defining initiative.

STRANGE CHANGE

When questioned as to the most significant change from the former title, Andersen is clear and to the point: "The biggest difference in making the two games was that *Hitman: Contracts* had to have this more surreal and darker feel, whereas *Hitman 2* was based a lot on the game feeling as real as possible... within the world of action and adventure, of course." Suffice it to say, this is probably the most sadistic Xbox game on the market. Mission accomplished then.

Behind all the gore and grime, however, lies solid technical prowess. The most impressive thing about 2002's *Hitman 2* was the >

ENEMIES ARE PUNCTURED WITH POOL CUES, AND BLOOD COAGULATES INTO CRIMSON PUDDLES ON FLOORS...

HANDS-ON

HITMAN: CONTRACTS



TOP GUN

HITMAN 2 WAS A BIG HIT ON XBOX. THE SEQUEL PROMISES TO BE DEEPER, DARKER, AND A LOT WEIRDER...

Words: Evan Shamoon

➤ IN WHAT MAY BE THE SINGLE LEAST SURPRISING BIT OF NEWS SINCE RUSH LIMBAUGH ADMITTED THAT, YES, HE HAS BEEN ON DRUGS THIS WHOLE TIME, *HITMAN: CONTRACTS* DOES NOT CONCERN ITSELF WITH PEACEFUL RESOLUTIONS. THERE ARE NO FUZZY BUNNY RABBITS TO TEND TO, NO ORPHANS' CHOIRS TO HELP FUND, NO "WINK WINK" OR "SMILEY FACE" EMOTICONS TO BE SENT TO OTHER PLAYERS. THERE IS NO HUGGING. RATHER, *CONTRACTS* FOLLOWS THE MOST READILY APPARENT TREND IN MODERN VIDEOGAMING: VICIOUS, UNFLINCHING BRUTALITY. >

HANDS-ON

HITMAN: CONTRACTS



From left to right:
Programmer Brian Meidell
Andersen, programmer Lars
Piester (on the floor), level
scripter Jacob Mikkelsen,
graphic artist Rasmus
Højengaard, graphic artist Peter
Fleckenstein Andersen, level
scripter Jonas Lind.

HANDS-ON

HITMAN: CONTRACTS



Sir Killsalot

Hitman is about an assassin. Hence, there will be more ways in *Contracts* to murder people. Levels are littered with makeshift weapons, from pool cues on billiard tables to butcher knives in kitchens. In one scene, Agent 47 secretly spikes an enemy agent's soup with laxatives, forcing him to run from the dining hall to the bathroom... where he can be properly "disposed of."



Level scripter Jesper Donnis.



< relatively open-ended nature of its gameplay, whereby players were able to approach any given mission in a variety of different ways. "Open-ended gameplay," it's a term that's bandied about quite a bit in videogame magazines such as this one—not to mention development circles, such as those of *Deus Ex* progenitor Warren Spector and Lionhead Studios chief Peter Molyneux—but very difficult to properly achieve.

And while *Hitman 2* did a more

than admirable job, surprising nearly everyone who played it with the freedom it allowed as to how a player could achieve his or her mission goal, there were enough technical glitches to significantly mar the experience. Not unlike this year's *Deus Ex 2: Invisible War*, *Hitman 2* suffered from NPCs' inability to function like the responsive, intelligent beings they represent: there were simply too many holes in the A.I. to create an entirely convincing overall

experience. Making one's way into a drug lord's mansion while dressed as a messenger can be a thrilling experience, but it's significantly less thrilling when you're replaying it for the fifth time in hopes that the A.I. will function properly.

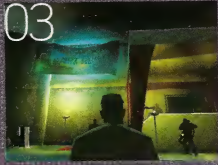
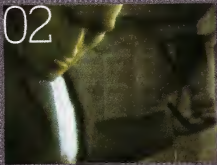
Drawing upon experience gained from creating last year's alternate-history shooter *Freedom Fighters*, the *Contracts* team of 50-odd people has spent a great deal of time on the game's A.I. Enemies will maneuver to flank your character >

ANATOMY OF A HIT

XBN dissects a mission to expose its dark heart

➤ Here's a typical journey through a mission in *Hitman: Contracts*, entitled "Slaughterhouse Two." While not all of the game's missions require the use of poultry, most allow for the varied options of dress up,

violence, and the ever-popular stealth action (commonly referred to around Xbox Nation HQ as "the new shooting"). You're not paid to be invisible...but it doesn't hurt.



➤ [1 & 2] As Agent 47, your first step here is to take out the butcher to gain general access to the Romanian Meat King's compound. You can choose to kill the butcher in any number of ways, but the quieter you are, the less likely you are to be caught. Just be sure to snag his outfit before leaving...

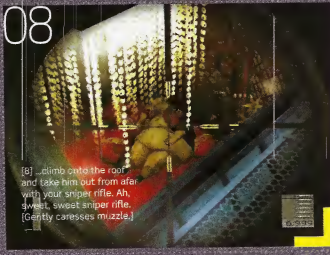
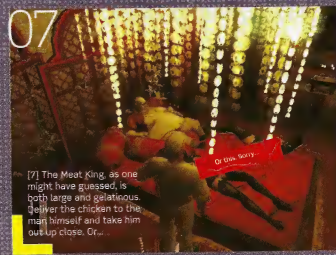
➤ [3] This way, you'll be able to wait right up to the front door in your snappy new butchery duds, ostensibly to cater Mr. Meat King's Not Guilty Fetish party.



➤ [4] You, inside the party, make your way to the kitchen. Pick up the roasted chicken and stow your weapon inside.

➤ [5] Walking through the party, you'll see some bizarre behavior along the way. Do not feed the hookers wearing duct tape on their nipples. Also, do not lick the pig carcasses.

➤ [6] Gently enter the Meat King's room. If you're being so, you'll be groped by this rather creepy-looking guard...so make sure your weapon is properly stowed inside your chicken.



[7] The Meat King, as one might have guessed, is both large and gelatinous. Deliver the chicken to the man himself and take him out up close. Or...

[8] ...climb onto the roof and take him out from afar with your sniper rifle. Ah, sweet, sweet sniper rifle. [Gently caresses muzzie.]



Agent 47 will don many a costume throughout his journey, including the ever-popular "old-man hat." (Above)



THE ATMOSPHERE IS AT ONCE TENSE, FILTHY, AND BEAUTIFUL...JUST THE RIGHT MOOD FOR AN ASSASSINATION.

< when approached en masse, and their ability to properly and consistently perceive peculiar behavior on the part of Agent 47 should be more consistent. There are fewer missions in *Contracts*, but those included are decidedly denser, with more to see and do in each mission, and more objectives and more varied ways of accomplishing them. Essentially, it's another attempt to effectively refine the ever-promising *Hitman* formula.

Graphically, *Contracts* is very reminiscent of the prior two games— not exactly pushing the Xbox

hardware, certainly, but it's a visually compelling ride nonetheless. Both the aircraft base ("Snowjob in Siberia") and the aforementioned meat locker/nightclub ("Slaughterhouse Two") manage a distinct, consistent visual style; as was the case with *Freedom Fighters*, *Contracts* does a superb job of creating compelling, subtly stylized environments through cunning use of color and lighting. The atmosphere is at once tense, filthy, and oddly beautiful...just the right mood for an assassination (or 300).

Essentially, Io and Eidos are promising a more consistent overall

experience with *Contracts*. Agent 47 will not slip and slide around his environments, as he so often did in *Hitman 2*, and the learning curve will be considerably less severe this time around. Jesper Kyd has returned to produce the game's soundtrack, creating something more contemporary than the music that accompanies the previous game (more beats, less Budapest Symphony Orchestra). It's a sequel of the "more, bigger, better" variety, rather than a complete overhaul—and, if properly executed, could be just what the mortician ordered. //

Buying a Video Game?

Play the game
that's right
for you!

You can give Tiger Woods a tennis racket, but he knows that golf is the game that's right for him. So how does Tiger know which computer and video games are OK to play? He checks the rating on every game box...And so should you!

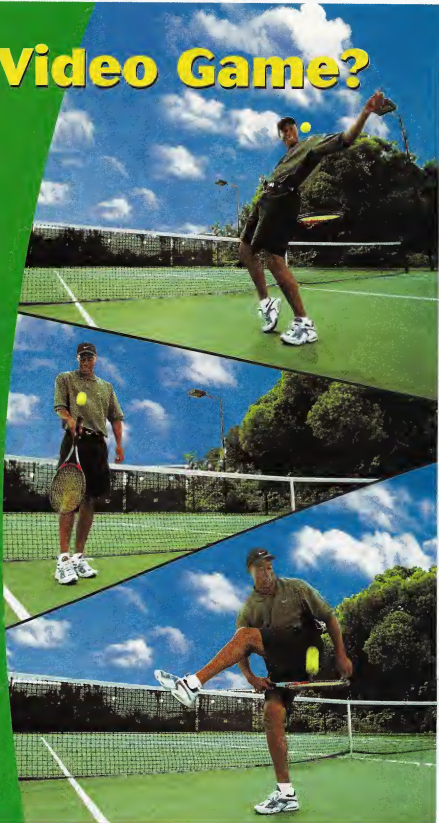
Computer and video game ratings have two parts: **rating symbols**, which tell you what age group the game is appropriate for and **content descriptors**, which tell you about specific content elements that may be of interest or concern.

So the next time you're choosing a game, check the rating and the content descriptors. And like Tiger Woods, play the game that's right for you.

ESRB

ENTERTAINMENT
SOFTWARE
RATING BOARD

www.esrb.org



CHECK THE RATINGS ON EVERY VIDEO GAME BOX



ON BACK



FUTURE

PREVIEWS AND IMPRESSIONS APRIL 2004

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THIS MONTH

Digital Hollywood: Art Imitating Art

Welcome to Future, XBN's spankin' new guide to the Xbox games you'll be playing tomorrow, next month, and the rest of the year. Emerging from our green crystal ball this issue is none other than the movie industry and the licensed games

riding its fluffy red designer coattails. There is no stopping the convergence. Videogames based on blockbuster movies used to suck—and occasionally, they still do. But as gaming continues to eclipse films in terms of profits, expect to see celluloid versions of

your favorite games, as well as action celebrities on your Xbox. XBN has its fingers tightly crossed that this marriage of movies and games will yield a first-person shooter starring Al Pacino as Colonel Frank Slade in *Scent of a Woman*. Hoo-ah! //

IN ROTATION: WHAT WE'RE PLAYING



1 Ninja Gaiden Xbox

Ninja Gaiden is Tecmo's glorious return to form. The beat-em-up adventure combines twitchy, old-school gameplay with patently Xbox-like eye candy.



2 Otogi 2 Xbox (Japanese)

Otogi 2, a gorgeous sequel to its supernatural predecessor, could be the only game to rival Ninja Gaiden in terms of visuals and gameplay. And we've been playing both. Nonstop.



3 RallySport Challenge 2 Xbox

Although we still have an early version of the game, there's enough of RallySport on the disc to give us months of reckless rally racing. See for yourself on page 63.



4 Far Cry PC

When we need a break from Breakdown's drab interior settings, we spend our days tanning on the tropical islands of Far Cry. Next month, we'll play the Xbox version.

XPECTING

XBN Readers' Top 5 Most Wanted Games

Own an Xbox is to wait for the next big thing. And in 2004, there are loads of big titles in the pipeline. Hit up our website (www.xbnmag.com) and let us know what your most anticipated game of the year is. Why? Because we care.

1



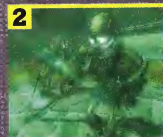
HALO 2

Microsoft / Sept. 2004

We're not sure what's worse, not knowing when the second coming will actually happen, or knowing that it's been pushed back until September. Bastards!



2



FABLE

Microsoft / July 2004

The evidence is rock solid: You want more RPGs on Xbox, and you wanted them yesterday. Slip into the tunic of a medieval hero and play 65 years in the life of your alter-ego in this innovative action-RPG.

3



DOOM 3

Microsoft / Sept. 2004

Doom 3 is further evidence that Xbox is, in oh-so many ways, making inroads into the PC gaming market. It's supposed to look damn nice to boot.

4



HALF-LIFE 2

Vivendi Universal / When It's Done

Stolen beta codes, release date delays, and an undying amount of hype and interest put *Half-Life 2* in fourth place this issue. Universally seen as the one game to rule them all (on PC), *Half-Life 2* will rock your socks.

5



TRUE FANTASY LIVE ONLINE

Microsoft / Winter 2004


Fifth place was a toss-up to the bitter end between *True Fantasy* and *Dead or Alive Ultimate*. You love Xbox Live.

FUTURE

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

Be an army of one with your Xbox controller

 You've heard of fanboys learning Japanese to play import RPGs, but have you ever seen an armchair commando mumble military jargon to wage virtual war? Well, that moment is nigh. Equipped with just your Xbox controller, you are an army of one in *Full Spectrum Warrior*, Pandemic's real-time, squad-based army simulator.

We recently enlisted in *Warrior*'s fictitious wartime scenario with a lengthy hands-on test and came away shell shocked and slack. Despite the game's innovative approach (it's a strategy game viewed from the middle of the

action—you issue orders to your team, but never directly control the movement or aim of a single character), the controls are surprisingly intuitive.

Like any game with an original concept, there is a bit of a learning curve in *Warrior*. Switching between soldiers and teams is as simple as a button press (or toggling the D-pad).

Movement orders are straightforward, but also context sensitive, so your troops are always aware of their surroundings, taking care to stay under the cover of buildings,



AUTHENTIC MODE

All pain, all gain

Those who want a real challenge can play in *Warrior*'s authentic mode—the version of the game designed by Pandemic for U.S. Army training purposes. You play the

whole game in one sitting (hence, no saving whatsoever), without the aid of health bars and ammo icons. Like a real squad leader, you'll need to heed audio cues from your men

for pertinent game information. Those who finish authentic mode have the option of uploading their best times online. Masochism is alive and well on Xbox.





burned-out cars, and even cow carcasses. According to director Wil Stahl, getting the player to understand the language of warfare is where the real difficulty lies. "That's our biggest obstacle," he says. "It's not in the controls—it's in getting people to understand the Army lexicon and the tactics."

To ease the learning curve, we took a crash course in basic urban warfare tactics. During urban combat, positioning is apparently half the battle. *Warrior* stresses a cover and move system where members of your squad (split into two teams of four) watch each other's backs as they advance.

Although the game is still in development, the action is already plenty chaotic. We had to be extremely careful when moving even short distances. Enemies, once triggered, are smart enough to dynamically engage you by taking cover, advancing, and retreating as the situation dictates. In one scene, we popped smoke canisters and

waited at least 30 seconds for the smoke to expand and billow over an open, vulnerable area, just so we could safely reach the next cover point.

In another instance, we set Alpha team up to provide cover fire, while Bravo made its way around the building to set up an open shot at enemies who were heavily dug in. It took five nerve-racking minutes and a couple hundred rounds to finally take them down.

Moving military-style for even a few blocks can be exhausting. Letting your guard down will get your guys bagged. One casualty and you're heavily encumbered (leave no man behind, remember?). Lose two guys and you're considered combat ineffective. *Warrior* may be a strange brew of multiple genres and conventions, but there's one thing the game is not—a cakewalk through infantry tactics. //

DAVID

DEV: Pandemic; PUB: THQ; PC: June

WEAPON OF CHOICE

A compact, close-quarters version of the army issue M16 assault rifle series, the M4 Colt carbine is the standard firearm for U.S. troops stationed in *Full Spectrum Warrior*. Click-clack!





THE MOVIES

It's good to make money together. Oh, and movies, too!

It's the feel-good film of the year, an action-packed nail-biter of a thrill ride that grabs you and simply won't let go. Best of all, you made it, cast the stars, bought the technology that'll be used to make it rock like a paper boat on the high seas, put money into the script, wrote your own dialogue, chose the costumes, and are now prepared to reap the financial rewards. Who would have thought a love story featuring zombies would be Oscar material? What's the high concept? If only it was this simple in real life. *The Movies* puts you in charge of your own film studio. In classic tycoon-style gameplay, you use your cash to build a celluloid empire from 1900 to 2010 and manage all facets of your movie business. On your studio lot, you buy and place all manner of buildings, from toilets to

trailers, themed movie sets to scriptwriters' offices. Stars can be recruited, groomed, and subsequently dropped, and far-flung technologies such as Smell-o-Vision and 3D can be researched and employed to give your movies added punch for the busy summers. Will it play in Peoria? Any or all of the game's three main areas can be focused on, Lead

Designer Adrian Moore says. Detail-minded moguls will want to have a hand in designing their studios and lots, building a stable of actors, and making the movies themselves. Advisers can manage the bits players don't want to handle, and Moore emphasizes players can make what they will of *The Movies*. Hooray for Hollywood? In motion, *The Movies* looks like a

souped-up *The Sims*. High-priced actors strut about with a swirl of dollars above their head. Paparazzi follow their every move, and God forbid if you don't give them a big enough trailer. "The bigger the celebrity, the bigger the pain in the ass," Moore says. //

QTR
DEV: Lionhead PUB: Activision RSL: Winter



MAKING MOVIES

It's cinematic gold, kid!

Adrian Moore from Lionhead drops down a simple movie lot on *The Movies*' play screen. Actors are called into place. Runners dress up a set and cameramen slide into position. Players can add props as necessary, but for this scene, all that's required is a shower. The

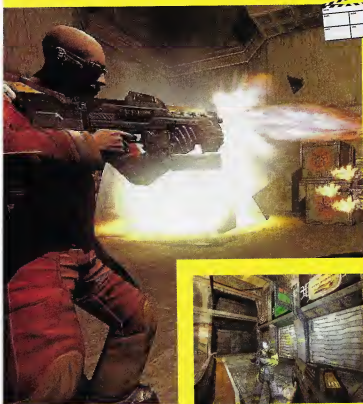
script has already been cobbled together, scriptwriters get fed money, and a treatment magically appears. Players choose the actors' actions from a preset list. Once filming begins, players can adjust the action by using various slider bars to increase or decrease a scene's

passion, intensity, terror, etc. In this case, Moore has created an homage to the shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's classic horror film *Psycho*, and when he's done, he'll be able to add captioned text to his film and replay its scenes at will. Box-office glory or *Shitav*-style infamy awaits!





XBOX SUMMER BLOCKBUSTERS

Hollywood hits its stride on Xbox. Enter *The Matrix*, these are not

Chronicles of Riddick

Vinnie Diesel as Richard B. Riddick, hard ass

▶ We liked Vin Diesel best when he was a nobody GI in *Saving Private Ryan*. Ironically, his second-best role is as Riddick on Xbox in Vivendi's latest first-person shooter. Serving as a prequel to *Pitch Black*, *Chronicles of Riddick* (the game) completes the mythology of the apparently very popular Riddick trilogy.

But I've never seen *Pitch Black*! Don't worry, neither have we. Using a series of flashbacks, you'll play out events integral to Riddick's history. As a first-person shooter, *Riddick* relies heavily on stealth, as well as the narrative-driven exploration and adventure. Imagine a first-person *Splinter Cell* set in a dingy postapocalyptic milieu and you're getting warm. Certainly is a looker, this one...

Absolutely. Liberal use of normal maps and per-pixel shading (you know, the stuff that makes *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2* look so good) creates seductive characters and ambience. Not a very flattering name, is it? No, not really. But know that *Riddick* is part of an entertainment puzzle that completes a universe neither the film nor game could create alone. //

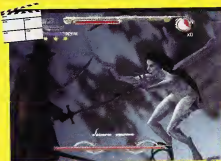


BALD IS BEAUTIFUL

Hair? Who the hell needs hair? With Riddick, Agent 47 from *Hitman*, and Telly Savalas in his great return as Kojak in *Kojak: Requiem for a Cop*, Xbox is blooming into the console of choice for the smooth and hairless.

CRITIC

DEV: Starbreeze PUB: Vivendi Universal REL: Summer



Van Helsing

Vampire hunter "H"

▶ Horror archetypes muddle the stage in this *Devil May Cry*-inspired action game. From *Dracula* to *Frankenstein*, famed monster hunter Van Helsing must vanquish Transylvania's collection of Hollywood horrors with an unholy arsenal of weapons. Werewolf? No problem. Drop that lycanthrope with a double buckshot! The license—and Kate Beckinsale's digital assets—should counteract the effects of the somewhat hackneyed gameplay. Hopefully. //

CRITIC

DEV: Saffire Studios PUB: Vivendi Universal REL: Summer



Spider-Man 2

Peter Porker, amazing Spider-Ham

▶ Reprising his role as the everyday superhero bitten by a radioactive spider, Peter Parker must deal with two affairs in this summer sequel: Doctor Octopus and pubescent love. Sure, the flick is high drama in a rubber suit, but the game is all about vastly improved webslinging and seamless city design. In fact, most of Manhattan is now available to you to explore, with gameplay freedom on the level of *Grand Theft Auto III* and *True Crime*. //

CRITIC

DEV: Treyarch PUB: Activision REL: Summer



The Punisher

...And justice for all

▶ Before *Max Payne* and *Nick Kang* redefined vigilantism with their lack of subtlety, there was Frank Castle, aka The Punisher. Really, it was only a matter of time before this '80s cult classic made the leap into polygons and celluloid. Based on the forthcoming flick of the same name, *The Punisher* is a third-person shooter about revenge. Sound familiar? Hopefully, the game's innovative interrogation system will set it apart from a pack of clones. //

CRITIC

DEV: Volition PUB: THQ REL: Summer

30 MINUTES

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

Be a prince among thieves with Ion Storm's latest stealth adventure. *XBN* slips into the shadows for an exclusive hands-on.

01:00

The Entrance

We begin the heist by hiding behind an oxcart in front of the castle, eavesdropping on two guards whining about their jobs ("I don't know why I'm so on edge all the time..."). The castle's cook, whom we've apparently paid off before the mission, will open a side door once we signal him by extinguishing a hanging torch across the courtyard. We do this by letting loose a crystallized water arrow (yeah, it's actually magical) at it. Darkness descends. Too easy.

**04:00**

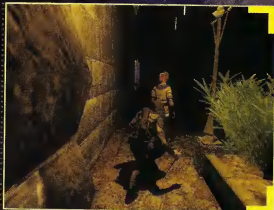
Raining Crates

We now have three routes into the castle: the front door, the high road to the roof, and that side door unlocked by our informant. Disabling the two sentries at the door is possible but risky, so we wimp out and climb the ladder to the roof. Unfortunately, we're spotted as we try to slink past a blazing torch. What to do? Pick up some wooden crates and pelt the guards from above. Amazingly enough, our stunt pays off and one of the two unsuspecting guards crumples into a flesh heap.

**09:00**

Death From Above

The guard's buddy is alerted and becomes far more obstinate than we anticipate. He's on to us ("Aha! What's this, then? I know you're around here!"), and as such, he can take a lot more punishment. We pelt him with three or four arrows to the chest (what the?), but he's still jogging about like an Olympian on crack. We don't want him alerting more guards, so we slide down the ladder and shiv him with our dagger for good measure. The whole ordeal is shockingly difficult.



WITH...

THE THIEF LINEAGE ↘

**Thief:
The Dark Project [PC]**

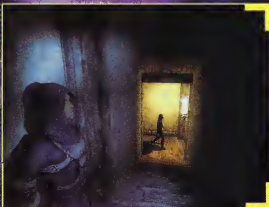
Know your roots, they say. In this case, the two battling sovereigns of stealth, Sam and Snake, owe a pretty penny to the original. *Thief* on PC. When *Thief* was released in the late '90s, it cemented stealth as a viable gameplay angle. The effects of this revolutionary title are still felt today.

**Thief II:
The Metal Age [PC]**

As was the case with *Thief II*, if it ain't broke, make it better. The sequel saw the master of "security through obscurity," Garrett, do what he does best—steal stuff. Improved AI, more diverse gameplay mechanics, and sexy steam-punk-esque visuals rejuvenated this PC series.

**In Like Flynn**

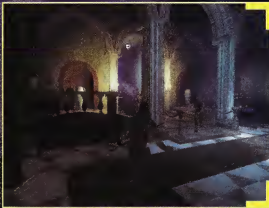
After dumping the poor sods in a dark corner, we make our way inside. As in the last two *Thief* games, light is your worst enemy—to be fully safe, we avoid well-lit places and extinguish random torches here and there. Since the game is playable in both first- and third-person views, we shift perspectives often for optimal sneaking efficiency. In the castle, the flicker of candles creates elongated shadows, while the sounds of footsteps ping-pong through the vaults. Ah, for the love of pirate booty.



12:00

Doctor Blackjack

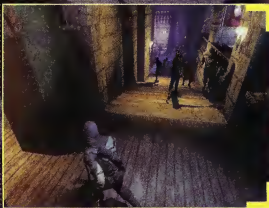
After some minor looting, we encounter a guard station. Seeing as our preferred modus operandi is to sneak up and bushwhack 'em from behind with our handy blackjack, we decide to do just that. We encourage a few guards to take a long nap before accidentally bumping into a rack of swords. Oops. *Thief*'s physics system (borrowed from *Deus Ex: Invisible War*) sends the whole damn thing crashing down, metal blades, hilts, and all. Lol Here come the guards. We decide to haul medieval ass.



19:00

Death Be Not Proud

With our puny dagger and a backpack full of arrows, we don't stand a chance against the ever-growing mob that's chasing us through the castle. Hiding in the shadows seems to work momentarily, but to our chagrin, we underestimate the AI and are discovered again. In *Thief*, direct confrontations against multiple guards usually result in nasty and brutish deaths...which is exactly what happened next. Err, sorry about that, Garrett. We promise we'll be more stealthy next time.



30:00

SAMURAI JACK

Neither Tom Cruise nor Toshiro Mifune

Samurai Jack is a man of few words, and why not? Jack simply lets his sword do the talking. Or, more to the point, the eviscerating. A Jack-of-all-trades?

In *Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku*, the cartoon warrior takes his act on the road, slicing up robots aplenty. This sashimi extravaganza

takes Jack to four separate realms in a balls-out brawl to rescue a series of prisoners and, ultimately, stomp the villainous Aku. Jack be nimble?

Jack's creator, Genndy Tartakovsky, contributes to the plot, and the voice actors for the show have been recruited as well. The game looks and feels like an interactive

cartoon. Shown in the third-person perspective, Jack must collect jade statuettes, which can then be used to augment his health, his strength, or his special-attack meter.

Jack be quick?

There's no escaping the fact that Jack relies heavily on its slice-n-dice style of play, but the developers do a decent job of mixing things up, at least initially. Early stages see Jack racing between giant idols that spit fire and leaping to new heights to sever the cords holding up a giant statue. In the special-attack (Sakai) mode, the gameplay slows to a crawl, allowing Jack to perform delicate and elegant barrel rolls, leaps, flips, and kicks to defeat his mechanical foes, whose destruction is highlighted by spectacular explosions, puffs of smoke, and neatly severed automaton parts. The jury's still out, but Jack's shadow might, just might, be as big as his robot-ass-kicking soul. //

OPINION

DEV: Adultrom PUBL: Sega RELEASE: Now



TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

Step on it, Harold!

We love Codemasters' *Pro Race Driver* in spite of its flaws. This sequel—now reunited with the coveted TOCA license—looks like it will give even the mighty *Project Gotham Racing 2* a run for its money.

What the hell is TOCA?

It's the European touring car license that Codemasters was proud to own during the last generation of consoles. What this license basically means is

lots of great cars and real tracks.

What sort of racer is this, then?

Pro Race Driver 2 doesn't limit itself to one style. Racing modes include GT sports car, street, rally, V8 supercars, rally cross, Formula Ford, and more, all running on Xbox Live.

Can you wreck your cars?

Absolutely. In fact, a serious crash will end your race, no exceptions.

This driving sim is the real deal. //

OPINION

DEV: Codemasters PUBL: Codemasters RELEASE: Spring



CRASH TEST RALLY

Mud, blood, sweat, and beers with Microsoft's RalliSport Challenge 2

The in-game ability to wreck your car with absolute abandon: Speed freaks and gearheads have begged for it since the early days of arcade racing, à la Ridge Racer. To heed the invisible plea of the vehicularly inclined, Microsoft and developer Dina have teamed up to redefine the term "fender bender" with RalliSport Challenge 2, an off-road racer that's as beautiful as it is brutal. For our test drive, they let the open road with nothing more than a six-pack of suds and our inebriated kudos.

CRASH TEST 1

Vehicle: Subaru Impreza WRX STi
Location: Coodibah course, Australia
Intoxication: Two beers

Our test drive begins in the Australian Outback, where we've just fired up a new turbo-charged WRX in the name of dirt and gravel. The first leg of this open track is uneventful. At this point, it seems that precision off-road drifting and aie are a match made in hog heaven. Then it all goes

to hell. We take our hand off the Controller S (why? To drink, of course) during a straightaway and quickly realize that the Impreza is fishtailing into a cluster of trees. F***! Correcting the car's trajectory only makes things worse. The Subaru tilts onto two wheels and

plummets into a vicious tumble. Bumpers, spoilers, doors, and safety glass sprinkle the landscape. Somewhere neither here nor there, the car hits a boulder and gracefully launches through the air like a 2-ton acrobat. The WRX is totaled, but there's more beer to consume.

CRASH TEST 2

Vehicle: Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VII
Location: Hydro Lane, Great Britain
Intoxication: Five beers and a shot of something nasty

Good times gone bad? You be the judge. For our second run, we strap into a powerful Evo VIII rally rocket and push our luck on England's muddy, rain-battered Hydro Lane. It isn't long before tragedy strikes. Coming out of the first corner, the

Evo takes to the skies after hurling over a bump at about 90 mph. No thanks to a spontaneous visit by Mr. Bacardi, we misjudge the approaching corner, bring the Evo sideways in midair, and land headlong in a nasty roll. How many

cartwheels, you ask? From the in-game dash, we lost count after the sky went from suicidal gray to crappy brown for the sixth rotation. A barrier keeps us from plowing into a crowd of fearless rubberneckers. You drink, you drive, you lose!

FUTURE

FIGHT NIGHT // PLAGUE OF DARKNESS

FIGHT NIGHT

All night long! (All night) All night long! (All night)...



➔ The problem with boxing games is that every match inevitably turns into a button-mash contest. Enter *Fight Night 2004*, a boxing title that EA promises will change the way you donkey punch your rivals.

What's so revolutionary then? *Fight Night* features a fluid punch-throwing system that intuitively maps different kinds of blows to various motions on the right analog stick. It takes a while to get used to, but once you do, it's visceral stuff. You'll throw different kinds of punches depending on your positioning: straight hooks, crosses, and jabs

when you're upright and their body-blow counterparts when you're hunched low. I like to hurt people. Will I like *Fight Night*? More than you can imagine. A complex physics system makes every blow resound with pain. Enemies' faces will contort when you make contact, and they'll fall like sacks of potatoes when knocked out. You can even tap 'em on the chin a few times on their way down, old sport. Who's the cover boy for EA this time? Infamous boxer Roy Jones Jr. EA is hoping that his roughneck vibe and boxing lifestyle will set the right tone for what may be the best 3D boxing game for consoles yet. //

DATE
DEV: EA GAMES REL: Now

PLAGUE OF DARKNESS

Not to be confused with SARS

➔ Did EA's *Lord of the Rings* games leave you wanting even more heroic savagery? Well,

Plague of Darkness might be your fix. It's a fantasy beat-'em-up with 80 percent more gore.

More Renaissance fair shenanigans?

Plague of Darkness takes place in medieval Europe during the Black Plague, although the fantasy-game clichés

are in full effect, the producer behind the recent shooter *Killswitch* is giving this relentless hack-and-slash a touch of gameplay magic. Ah, so there's a knight, a mage, and a thief, each with unique abilities? Pretty much. The knight cleaves mad guts with his burly sword, while the thief fights more like a hunter: lown mowow. Lastly, the female wizard shoots magic from her hands. Sounds kinda generic so far.

Who's optimistic about *Darkness*? The French-developed game oozes a moody European aesthetic à la *Beyond Good & Evil*. Let's hope the gameplay lives up to its looks. //



DATE
DEV: Wildscreen PUB: Namco REL: Fall



ILLUSTRATION BY XBOX NATION

Goldeneye coming to Xbox

EA's flexing their carte blanche power with the Bond 007 license by making their own version of *Goldeneye*. Unrelated to the seminal Nintendo 64 FPS classic, this reimagining of the *Goldeneye* license will have you playing as a renegade Double-O agent who has to rid the world of villains such as Dr. No, Oddjob, and Jaws in order to be the ultimate Dr. Evil. Ridiculous, but true.

**Cronus bonus**

Tecmo let slip that *Dead or Alive: Code Cronus* will be neither fighting nor sports, rather a completely new genre in gaming.

World of Microsoft

According to German game site Hesse Online, Microsoft may be in negotiations to buy publishing giant Vivendi Universal. Why? Microsoft wants to bring Blizzard's upcoming massively multiplayer online role-playing game, *World of Warcraft*, to the Xbox first with a PC release later à la Halo. Keep your swords crossed for this one.

**BloodRayne 2**

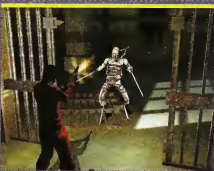
Rayne, star of the original *BloodRayne*, both sucks and bites. Her new adventure pits her and her tightly packaged buttocks against a cult of vampires dedicated to curing that peaky formula where sunlight equals instant death for the undead. Increased seuciness added. Rayne will also be able to perform 12 new fatality moves and tap into new powers such as Ghost Feed, allowing her to suck 'em spectral powers from her foes. //

DEV: **UTIM**DEV: *Terminator Reality* PUB: *Majesco Games* REL: *October***Dead Man's Hand**

A first-person shooter set in the Wild West? With Atari's latest gold-rush effort, it just may work, especially with *Dead Man's Hand*'s Unreal technology and Xbox Live playability. As gunslinger El Tejón, players must hunt down members of crime gang The Nine or be prepared to die trying. Expect nine different firearms, 25 dusty terrains, and lots of dead yellow-bellied greenhorns. //

DEV: **ATARI**DEV: *Human Head* PUB: *Atari Games* REL: *Summer***Darkwatch:**
Curse of the West

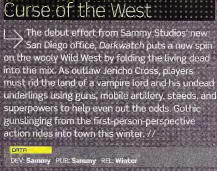
The debut effort from Sammy Studios' new San Diego office, *Darkwatch* puts a new spin on the wooly Wild West by roling the living dead into the mix. As outlaw Jericho Cross, players must rid the land of a vampire lord and his undead underlings using guns, mobile artillery, steeds, and superpowers to help even out the odds. Gothic gunslinging from the first-person perspective action rides into town this winter. //

DEV: **UTIM**DEV: *Sammy* PUB: *Sammy* REL: *Winter***The Suffering**

They don't call it "the slammer" for nothing. In *The Suffering*, an over-the-top orgy of gore and profanity, inmate Torque does hard time in a haunted jail and must earn his parole by killing monsters and, at times, becoming one himself. Is Torque guilty of murdering his family? Did he really drop the soap accidentally? Will Midway's formula of run-and-gun meets *Resident Evil* bear deliciously horrific fruit? Find out next issue. //

DEV: **UTIM**DEV: *Barbar Software* PUB: *Midway* REL: *April***Daredevil:**
The Man Without Fear

Marvel's blind superhero, *Daredevil*, seems an unlikely choice for videogame treatment, but nonetheless, he's Xbox-bound. Players can activate his special "radar sense" to track enemies by their smell and find hidden locations. *Daredevil*'s crazy third-person-perspective acrobatics can be performed with the aid of a grappling hook doubling as a club. It sounds great, but where's the *Ghost Rider* game? //

DEV: **UTIM**DEV: *Encore* PUB: *Encore* REL: *Summer***Future Tactics:**
The Uprising

Anybody with eyes can see that *Future Tactics*, for lack of a better expression, looks like ass. Our recent hands-on with a preview build confirmed as much. And yet, we actually couldn't stop playing it...at least for a couple hours anyway. Strangely old school with its turn-based strategy gameplay and slightly new school with its less-than-good 3D graphics, *Tactics* is an odd animal with sleeper written all over it. //

DEV: **UTIM**DEV: *Grave* PUB: *Grave* REL: *Spring*



MEN OF VALOR

Do I have to go back to this hell again? (Yes.)

◆ Vietnam is the new Europe, and everything old is new again. As the World War II infatuation dries up from the gaming landscape, in swoops the Vietnam War to take its place, in an uncanny way mimicking history as it happened. With *Men of Valor*, developer 2015 (Medal of Honor: Allied Assault) hopes to recreate the best—and worst—moments of history's most controversial war. So it's basically *Medal of Honor* with Vietnam skins and Hendrix licks? Sort of. As a private in the U.S. Marine Corps, players begin their tour of duty during the Tet Offensive. Portrayed as an everyman action hero, you'll have to save your platoon's heinies as often as your own. Considering the touchy subject matter and political

residue, *Men of Valor*'s digital depiction of the Vietnam War may end up as controversial as the conflict itself. Am I fighting a one-man war? Nope. You can issue commands to a group of squadmates, call in chopper and artillery strikes, and generally make a real mess of things in the jungle. Sounds perfect for Xbox Live... It is. That's why *Valor* features a two-player co-op game (on- and offline), as well as a slew of Xbox Live multiplayer modes for up to

eight players (more with a dedicated server). As either the Allies or the Communists, you get to lock ideologies in the following modes: deathmatch, team deathmatch, recover the document (capture the flag, basically), search and destroy (retrieve pieces of a mortar to bombard the enemy base), and lastly, historical objective (battles based on real Vietnam scenarios). *Seper fil //*

DATE: 2005 (PUB: Vivendi) DEV: Winter



SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67

The smell of napalm in your Xbox

✎ Never been to Vietnam? No worries, neither has buzz-worthy developer Guerrilla, currently hard at work on Sony's forthcoming killer app *Killzone* for PlayStation 2. What *Guerrilla* has done instead is pore over volumes of research material on the Vietnam War to bring you *ShellShock*, a gritty single-player

look at one man's journey into the heart of darkness.

So what sets this game apart from *Men of Valor*?

Besides being exclusively single player, *ShellShock* is less about controlling a squad of men and more about contributing to a team of intelligent A.I. friends to accomplish your mission. Think of it as the *Half-Life* of Vietnam games.

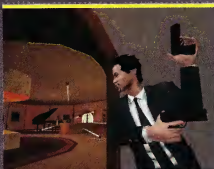
What's with the title of the game? Like its namesake, *ShellShock* will cover some of the more unsavory moments during America's long bitter fight. Included inside: an actual prisoner-torturing minigame and virtual executions. //

DATE: 2005 (PUB: Vivendi) DEV: Winter



MEGA BITS

Little satellites of love on the horizon

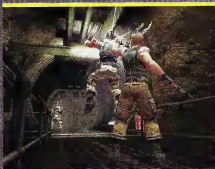


100 Bullets

When agent Graves hands you an attaché case with a gun and 100 untraceable bullets, you know someone's getting hurt. Senseless murder and poignant tales of revenge come to Xbox when Accurian brings the popular Vertigo comic book *100 Bullets* to Xbox. Expect lots of wholesale slaughter, two playable characters, and a surprise feature Accurian promises will "blow away bullet time." //

DATE

DEV: Accurian PUB: Accurian REL: October

Psi-Ops:
The Mindgate Conspiracy

A mind is a powerful thing with which to waste the opposition. As a Psi-Ops agent in this 3D adventure, you tap the power of your abnormally enlarged brain to lift and hurl objects, set things on fire, drain life force from unwitting victims, and even use inanimate objects as surfboards to glide over dangerous spots. *Psi-Ops* features mediocre graphics, but is strangely compelling all the same. All hail the brain! //

DATE

DEV: Midway PUB: Midway REL: June

Headhunter:
Redemption

In the distant future, the Morlocks and Elai co-ops, in Sega's *Headhunter: Redemption* (sequel to the Dreamcast game *Headhunter*), Jack Wade polices "Below," where the criminals dwell, for his employers—the folks living in the realm "Above." Welcome to H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, but with more face shootings, a higher resolution, two playable characters, and motorcycle chases aplenty. //

DATE

DEV: Amuse PUB: Sega REL: Fall

Combat Elite:
WWII Paratroopers

Drop in on Uncle Adolf and give the Ratzl bastards a good drubbing in this top-down third-person-perspective WWII shooter. More than 40 historical missions are included, and soldiers will see their Nazi-killing skills improve as the game progresses. Two-player co-op play more than makes up for the absence of Hitlerbots and the ability to conclude the game by ranning your fist into Hitler's beer belly. //

DATE

DEV: BattletechEnt. PUB: Accurian REL: June

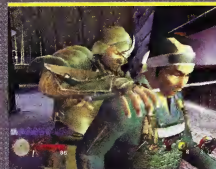


Mafia

Hearken back to the swingin' 1930s when "business" was conducted with a tommy gun and a hidden shiv in this third-person-perspective shooter. The popular PC game gets ported to Xbox with a minimum of fuss and a maximum amount of gang warfare. One particularly delightful mission saw protagonist Tommy Angelo popping some goombah while said goon was sitting on the can. Coppola-esque, to be sure. //

DATE

DEV: The Gathering PUB: Take 2 REL: Now

Tenchu:
Return From Darkness

The PlayStation 2 ninja epic *Tenchu: Return From Darkness* gets a face lift on Xbox, with Activision including a two-player cooperative mode and deathmatch via Xbox Live. Beyond the online play, *Tenchu* offers three playable characters, more than 20 different weapons, and a renewed A.I. system (read: less brain-dead and hopefully more believable), providing for better balanced and more challenging ninja times. //

DATE

DEV: KOE PUB: Activision REL: Now

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MONTHLY
UPDATE

JADE EMPIRE

BioWare character designer Rion Swanson deals the hand of death

Jade Empire will undoubtedly be the biggest Xbox RPG in 2004. From the mouths of its creators, XBN tracks the monthly development of BioWare's Eastern expansion.

As one of the toughest, and most aggressive characters in Jade Empire, Death's Hand plays an important role as a major villain. The direction given to

me was to create a villain that was both strong and mysterious.

At this point, I can only divulge this bit of information about Death's Hand: Anyone who comes across this character can expect a boss encounter like no other. He plays an integral part to the storyline, yet remains one of the most mysterious roles in Jade Empire.

Design on him began by looking at images of armored characters from movies and books based on

stories of the Three Kingdoms and Outlaws of the Marsh. A major source of inspiration came from figurative sculptures of Asian celestial pantheons.

Since he is the general of armies in the game, as well as the leader of the Emperor's personal bodyguards, the Order of the Lotus Assassins, concepts started out with Death's Hand looking like a powerful general. By adding demonic faces over his armor, we gave him a more fearsome

look. About 30 rough sketches were made before we settled on what you see here. Dominant dark tones were used to maintain some color, with the red and gold helping to create movement, especially when he moves around showering you with a frenzy of fists and kicks.

Rion Swanson
Artist, BioWare

DEV: BioWare PLUS: Microsoft EBL: Winter



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders?

Back in Xbox Nation issue #9, we previewed, with much fanfare, *Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders*, an epic real-time strategy/action title from Korean-based developer Phantagram. That was more than six months ago. Since that time, any hype and info on *Crusaders* has all but



disappeared. So what's the deal, has the game been canceled? Although Phantagram declined to respond, we do know that the company recently severed ties from NCSoft when it reacquired the 70 percent ownership back from the Texas-based publisher. Furthermore, in order to focus on *Crusaders* development, all working titles under the Phantagram wing, namely sci-fi shooters *Quality and Strident*, have been canned. Producer Dee Lee says Phantagram is working to find a publisher for this promising Xbox Live strategy game in 2004.

DEV: Phantagram PUB: TBA REL: TBA



Playlist

WHAT'S COMING TO XBOX...AND WHEN

FUTURE

PLAYLIST

GAME	PUBLISHER	RELEASE	LIVE
100 Bullets	Acclaim	October	No
Advent Rising	Majesco	September	TBA
Alias	Acclaim	April	No
Area 51	Midway	September	TBA
Armada 2: Star Command	Metro3d	TBA	No
B.C.	Microsoft	Fall	No
BloodRayne 2	Majesco	October	No
Burnout 3	EA	September	TBA
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	Fall	TBA
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Acclaim	June	No
Conker: Live and Uncut	Microsoft	Fall	Yes
Daredevil	Encore	Summer	No
Darkwatch	Sammy	December	Yes
Dead Man's Hand	Atari	Summer	Yes
Dead or Alive Code: Cronus	Tecmo	TBA	TBA
Dead or Alive Ultimate	Tecmo	Summer	Yes
Dead to Rights II: Hell to Pay	Namco	Fall	TBA
Digimon Rumble Arena 2	Bandai	May	No
Doom 3	Activision	Fall	Yes
DRIV3R	Atari	June	No
DroneZ	Metro3d	TBA	No
ESPN Major League Baseball	Sega	March	Yes
Fable	MS	Summer	TBA
Far Cry	Ubisoft	TBA	Yes
Fight Club	Vivendi	Winter	TBA
Fight Night 2004	EA	March	No
FILA World Tour Tennis	Xicat	TBA	No
Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	June	Yes
Funkmaster Flex's Digital Hits Factory	XS Games	TBA	No
Future Tactics	Crave	Spring	No
Goldeneye	EA	TBA	TBA
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	TBA	TBA
Halo 2	Microsoft	September	Yes
Hardcore 4x4	XS Games	TBA	No
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	EA	Winter	No
Headhunter: Redemption	Sega	Fall	No
Hittman: Contracts	Eidos	April	No
IndyCar Series 2005	Codemasters	May	Yes
Jade Empire	Microsoft	Winter	No
Juiced	Acclaim	Fall	Yes
Justice League	Midway	August	No
Kameo: Elements of Power	MS	September	No
Knights of the Old Republic 2	LucasArts	TBA	TBA
Legends of Wrestling: Showdown	Acclaim	June	No
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	Vivendi	TBA	No
Lobo	Kemco	TBA	No
Malice	Bethesda	Fall	No
Manhunt	Rockstar Games	April	No
Marvel vs. EA	EA	Winter 2005	TBA
Maxxis ATV	Metro3d	September	No
MechAssault 2	MS	Winter	Yes

GAME	PUBLISHER	RELEASE	LIVE
Men of Valor: Vietnam	Vivendi	Winter	Yes
Mercenaries	LucasArts	TBA	TBA
Metal Slug 3	SNK	Fall	No
Micro Mayhem	Jaleco	April	No
MLB SlugFest: Loaded	Midway	April	Yes
MTV Music Generator 3	Codemasters	May	No
NARC	Midway	August	No
NBA Ballers	Midway	April	No
Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	Fall	Yes
Painkiller	Dreamcatcher	Fall	Yes
Perfect Dark Zero	Microsoft	TBA 2005	Yes
Pilot Down	Dreamcatcher	TBA	No
Plague of Darkness	Namco	Fall	No
Psi-Ops:	Midway	June	No
The Mindgate Conspiracy			
Psychonauts	Microsoft	Winter	No
Pure Pinball	XS Games	TBA	No
RalliSport Challenge 2	Microsoft	5/4/04	Yes
Red Dead Revolver	Rockstar	Spring	No
Red Ninja: End of Honor	Vivendi	Fall	No
Scaler	TDK	Winter	No
Shadow Ops: Red Mercury	Atari	June	Yes
Shayde: Monsters vs. Humans	Metro3d	October	No
Shellshock: Nam '67	Eidos	TBA	No
Shrek 2	Activision	Summer	No
Silent Hill 4	Konami	Fall	No
Sitting Ducks	Hip Games	Spring	No
SNK vs. Capcom SVC Chaos	SNK	November	Yes
Spider-Man 2	Activision	June	No
Star Wars: Battlefront	LucasArts	Fall	Yes
Star Wars: Republic Commando	LucasArts	Fall	Yes
StarCraft: Ghost	Blizzard	Summer	No
State of Emergency 2	Rockstar Games	Winter	TBA
Steel Battalion: Line of Contact	Capcom	March	Yes
Street Racing Syndicate	Namco	Fall	No
Sudeki	Microsoft	Summer	No
The Chronicles of Riddick	Vivendi	June	Yes
The Fast and the Furious	Vivendi	Winter	No
The Mummy	Hip Games	May	No
The Punisher	THQ	Fall	No
The Red Star	Acclaim	October	No
The Suffering	Midway	April	No
Thief: Deadly Shadows	Eidos	May	No
TimeSplitters 3	EA	TBA	TBA
TOCA Race Driver 2	Codemasters	May	Yes
Trivial Pursuit	Atari	April	Yes
Tron 2.0	Buena Vista Games	TBA	Yes
True Fantasy Live Online	Microsoft	Winter	Yes
Van Helsing	Vivendi	May	No
Worms 3D	Acclaim	April	Yes
X-Files: Resist or Serve	Vivendi	March	No
X-Men Legends	Activision	May	No
Yu-Gi-Oh! Xbox (tentative title)	Konami	March	No



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XCRATED

SMART REVIEWS APRIL 2004

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SCORING ANEW

Xrated: The final word on Xbox games and peripherals

There have been ch-ch-changes to Xbox Nation and to these review pages.

You'll note Xrated is more colorful than ever before, the artwork leaping off the pages to just about throttle you. Also, this issue, you'll spot all-new columns, peripheral reviews, and flashbacks to old Xbox games, in case you're in the mood to buy used. Trash peddlers should be very afraid, as The Loser File has been opened. In addition, reviewers will now be

pulling out specific details about Xbox Live features to bring you the full Monty for online play. Look for the orange boxes containing Live information.

The move to a monthly schedule means more timely reviews—and more exclusive critiques. This issue, XBN presents a world-exclusive review for Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow, blown out over a whopping eight pages. And in the big surprise department, Namco's Breakdown has stunned everyone

with its flawed genius and the best first-person face-punching action seen in videogames.

This reviews section has been rebuilt for you. Feel free to send your thoughts, blindly heaped praise, or heartfelt criticisms to XBN@ziffdavis.com.

Oh, and regretfully, Tecmo's oft-delayed action game *Ninja Gaiden* has again escaped XBN's grasp. The ninja adventure will be reviewed next issue.

Promise.

APRIL XCRATED AWARDS ↴

Game of the Month



Tom Clancy's Splinter
Cell Pandora Tomorrow

Sneaking is the new shooting, and Sam Fisher is the genre's returning American Idol. He's paid to be invisible but still manages to rock this high-profile adventure.

Best Freakout



Breakdown
Namco

Former New York Mets center fielder Richie Ashburn once remarked, "I don't know what it is, but I know I've never seen it before." Breakdown is just like that. With upchucked lunch

Old School Dis-Missed!



Intellivision Lives!
Crave

Actually, Intellivision is quite dead. Its once-brilliant games are collected in *Intellivision Lives!* but the thrill is gone. It's like school on a Saturday: no class.

Cellular Damage Award



Auto Modellista
Capcom

Look at those cartoonish cars. Cel shading rules, but here's a hint to developers: Make sure your pretty cel-shaded graphics are used in a—what's that word?—game.



LAST MONTH'S HIT OR MISS ↘



Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne (Rockstar)

Brooding cop Max Payne shoots people, then broods. Then there's a cut-scene after which Payne warms up for some brooding by shooting more people.



Curse: The Eye of Isis DreamCatcher

When in doubt, always go with a paraphrased Simpsons reference. Ah, the cursed one! How's that curse DreamCatcher Games cursed you with, cusedy?

MAKING THE GRADE

The score's the thing...

➤ Celebrate greatness. Flush video feces. This is the mandate. Xbox Nation game reviewers are given and the philosophy its critics operate under. XBN strives to be harsh but fair in its scoring. With games costing upwards of \$50, no one benefits from reviews with padded scores and, as mom always told us, honesty is the best policy.

Breaking down review grades, you'll find a game with a score of one is Satan's bedchild. Two indicates raw sewage. Three is embarrassing. Four is flawed. Five

equals average. Six is all right. Seven is good. Eight great. Nine is excellent, and 10 out of 10 is near-perfection.

XBOX LIVE

➤ Look for this handy-dandy box describing a game's Xbox Live content. As always, Xbox Live content will be factored in to achieve a holistic final grade.

XCRATED

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TONIGHT

AN XBOX NATION WORLD EXCLUSIVE



BACK TO

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft // DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Shanghai // PLAYERS: 1-4 // TIME: Yes // MSRP: \$49.99 // ESRB: T

Opening Pandora's Xbox

Looking back, it's strange to think it took a newcomer like the original Tom Clancy's *Splinter Cell* to finally put Xbox on the map for a whole generation of gamers. Strange because the game was an uncompromising vision of stealth tactics—a less-stylish, rough-around-the-edges, hard-as-rocks take on the great *Metal Gear Solid* series. But *Cell*'s popularity was certainly understandable. Although the game lacked outrageous villains

and an impossibly dense mythos, it looked and felt realistic. It was easy to identify with aging war hero Sam Fisher as he defended America from its invisible enemies overseas.

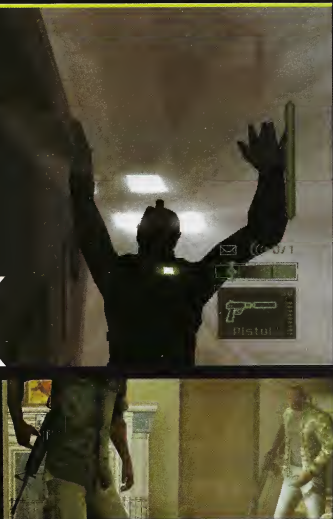
Plus, the game looked fantastic from top to bottom; its contrasts between light and shadow were unprecedented on any system. But could *Cell*'s creators pull off a truly mind-blowing sequel in less time than it takes most developers to squeeze out games shades more mediocre? You bet yer black rubber

suit they can. *Pandora Tomorrow* may not feel like a full-blown sequel at first, but stick to the shadows long enough, and you will eventually see *Tomorrow*'s light.

A TALE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

For all its gameplay innovation, the original *Cell* felt like a narrative disaster. You didn't much care for context as much as, say, the moment-to-moment tension of sneaking around foreign embassies and presidential palaces, making the

BLACK



// Darkened corners are ideal for dumping bodies and keeping them well-hidden. In this scene, a side door allows you to bypass this office completely. Just don't get spotted by the walking sentries.

// You have several ways of dealing with this unfortunate salaryman. Sneak past him unseen; drag him into a corner then clock him in the head; or fire a smoke grenade into his cube to incapacitate both the desk jockey and security guard.

// Peeking around corners isn't just an aesthetic showpiece. It's actually harder for the A.I. to spot you when you're leaning against a shadowy wall.

> prequel feel like a collection of disjointed stealth adventures. For its encore, Ubisoft crafts a story with much more urgency and relevance to real-world fears. It is the year 2006. An

Indonesian guerrilla group has attacked the U.S. embassy in Dili, East Timor, in retaliation for America's growing military presence on its soil.

Superspy-cum-George-Clooney-look-alike Fisher (a "splinter cell" of Third Echelon, a top-secret organization under the umbrella of the National Security Agency) is summoned to investigate possible intelligence leaks.

From that initial premise, *Tomorrow* takes you on an espionage roller coaster, jettisoning you

TOMORROW USES POWERFUL STORYTELLING DEVICES THAT GAMES SELDOM EMPLOY

from East Timor to France, then Israel, and back again to Indonesia in the name of the American way. In this respect, *Tomorrow* rings true to its predecessor. What the sequel improves upon in spades is the overall pacing of the game. Story aside, level environments are distinguished by visual and design differences focusing on various aspects of *Tomorrow's* gameplay.

To give the plot a much more personal, even psychological, stake, the writers have included branching story lines and multiple endings.

They even encourage the player to disobey orders, questioning the very ethics of U.S. military expansionism. In terms of gameplay, a much deeper story also translates into deeper player involvement. Those with a conscience will invariably find themselves taking pains to avoid lethal takedowns, even at the risk of potential failure. And later on, when you're given a direct order to execute terrorists, the emotional hesitation is real. Narratively, *Tomorrow* uses powerful storytelling devices that videogames, to their >



Sam "Snake Eater" Fisher stalks his prey in the jungles of Indonesia.



Enemy A.I. is smarter and generally more aggressive this time around. Alert a guard, and the rest come pouring in.

> detriment, seldom employ.

OLD SPY, NEW TRICKS

For a sequel, *Tomorrow* is more about refining the series' already expansive list of useful techniques. Of the few new tricks the sequel introduces, only one of them—whistling to attract attention—is ever practical when running the stealth gauntlet. The impressive-looking yet painfully underused split jump is back. This time, you can use the move as a way to reach higher platforms (as a substitute for the inconsistent wall jump in the last game). Lastly, Fisher can bust a "S.W.A.T. turn" to quickly get across

lit doorways or slide from cover to cover. The move itself exudes badass attitude, but, like the split jump, it's useful only when the environment specifically caters to such a technique.

More significant in *Tomorrow* are the improvements made to Fisher's lexicon of toys, as well as the streamlined user interface. Switching weapons and equipment no longer requires an onscreen submenu; now you can do all that cumbersome stuff from the last game with the touch of the D-pad and in real time. Those of you who loathed wasting entire pistol clips on shooting out light bulbs at point-blank range will rejoice in the fact your sidearm now comes standard with a laser pointer for precision targets at any range. Also handy is the option to slip into a first-person view for peering through your binoculars (now with night and thermal vision), all the better to

plan your ninja-like stunts.

THINK TWICE, ACT ONCE

If you thought the original *Cell* was the next step in stealth-action gameplay, just wait until you try to crack *Tomorrow*'s serious obsession with hide-and-go-seek. The sequel's single-player scenarios take the tactical play of its predecessor and intensify every situation with carefully crafted level design. As with the last game, a keen sense of sound and vision is crucial to the overall experience.

Darkness and light, elements playing such key roles in the series, return to reign in *Tomorrow*. Thanks to the sequel's souped-up graphics engine, shadows as thick as tar pervade every unlit environment, while the intense flare from a spotlight burns every bit as much as a flashlight in the dark. The game conditions its players through tense ambiance and high stakes to stay >

THE GAME CONDITIONS ITS PLAYERS THROUGH TENSE AMBIANCE

SUICIDE MISSION

"Fisher, you're paid to be invisible!"

Anybody who's played Tom Clancy's *Splinter Cell* can attest to the swelling rage when you're inexplicably discovered for the nth number of times by something unseen.

To rectify criticism received from the last game, Ubisoft has installed Tom Clancy's *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* with a more lenient and systematic approach to getting busted by the fuzz.

If enemies happen to spot you—that is, if they investigate your carelessness and actually see you—then they radio their

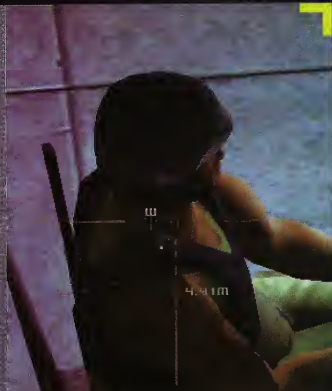
comrades and a stage-one alarm kicks in. At stage one, enemies don flak jackets, making them harder to take down. If they happen to see you again, then it's bumped up to a stage-two alarm and now on top of body armor, guards put on helmets, making headshots much less lethal. If you screw up bad enough, the mission ends with a stage-three alarm. Tragically, many of *Tomorrow*'s levels still enforce a frustrating one-alarm-and-it's-over rule, effectively neutralizing the improved gameflow. It's two steps forward, one step back.



■ Get too careless and you'll attract the attention of guards who'll come and investigate. Get rid of him quick.



■ After triggering the first alarm, guards will slip on flak vests (then helmets) for a safer, bulkier look.



↑ 300M+
↓ 300M-

Up Directional Pad
Down Directional Pad

XRATED

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW



SHADOW STRIKE

How good is *Pandora Tomorrow* online?

Tom Clancy's *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow* may feature an epic single-player adventure, but it's *Shadow Strike*, the game's revolutionary Xbox Live component, catapulting this sequel into instant-classic status. Its four-on-four matches work in theory much like the basic game itself. Using a creative arsenal of tech gadgets and stealth skills, spies need to sneak their way around poorly lit maps to neutralize objectives. Mercenaries, on the other hand, are armed to the teeth and itching to pop caps. Together in one arena, it's a real-time game of cat and mouse.

Ingenuous is the fact that the gameplay takes place from different perspectives depending on your role—spies are in traditional third person, while mercenaries operate in a more immersive first-person style. As a spy, you see more of your surroundings, giving you maximum vantage for stealth and acrobatics. Meanwhile, night-watch duty as a mercenary armed with motion detectors and torchlights is an

immersive first-person view is as claustrophobic as it is ambient.

Mood and innovation is one thing, but how does all of this play out on Xbox Live? It's extremely intense and supremely balanced. Imagine you and a buddy are mercenaries on the prowl for spies. The round begins with the two of you laying down baby traps around the likely targets of the spies' infiltration.

Then something catches the corner of your eye and you flood the alcove with the torchlight attached to your hand cannon. From the catwalk, you can see someone crouched in the shadows...but what's this fucking red dot—zap! You've been hit by a spy tazer. Your vision degrades and you convulse from the shock. A few moments later, the effects wear off and you retaliate by peppering hot lead into the darkened void. Before you get a chance to holl your teammate for backup, spy number two grabs you from behind and whispers a farewell in your ear before snapping your neck. Then it's back to black.

WEAPONS OF CHOICE



Mines

Use mines to teach those pesky spies an explosive lesson. Mines come in two great flavors: laser and proximity. Laser mines cover a greater range, but are easier to spot, while proximity mines are better hidden, but harder to trigger.

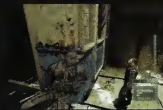


Spy Bullets

Communication is the lifeline of *Pandora Tomorrow*. Secretly pop a spy bullet onto unsuspecting mercenaries to literally eavesdrop on enemy communications. Innovative and ultimately infinitely useful, the spy bullet is a must for any tech-ninja.



A cookie?
Thank you!



Terrorist Sadano sets up to sound check for his big show tonight.

THE ENEMY'S RANDOM BEHAVIOR GIVES TOMORROW AN ELEMENT OF VOLATILITY

> hidden. After time, creeping through the abyss becomes just as second nature as it is to, say, aim for head shots in Tom Clancy's *Rainbow Six 3* on Xbox Live. Best of all, whether it's claustrophobic closets or gorgeous outdoor jungles, the light sourcing always looks natural—like an uncanny, near-photo-realistic replication of the real world.

In more subtle but equally as important ways, *Tomorrow's* AI has also been tweaked. Foes are still a ways off from the brightest and most intelligent enemies on Xbox (i.e., *Halo*), but they're tenacious enough to constantly keep you on

your toes. The enemies also exude moments of randomness, giving *Tomorrow*, for better or worse, an element of volatility each time you try to tackle an area. While dynamic experiences are welcome in any game, *Tomorrow's* unpredictability is also the game's biggest and most frustrating flaw. Just like in the original *Cell*, expect to fail plenty of missions simply because the game caught something you didn't anticipate, be it a hidden corpse, a speck of light on your shoulder, or any number of unseen variables. To make matters worse, at least a third of the missions have an all-or-

nothing detection rule, so one screwup, and it's back to the last checkpoint, where you'll invariably have to watch, listen, or thumb through a cut-scene (replete with heinous voice acting) you've already viewed 37 times.

Getting through *Tomorrow's* dense single-player mode takes 10 to 15 hours, give or take. The deal breaker here for some may be the extreme trial-and-error nature of the game. While frustrating and repetitive, the solo missions are also ones you master absolutely. And when you emerge—near wrecked, bloodshot eyes and all—after the

final credits, the feeling of accomplishment is colossal.

THE HARD CELL

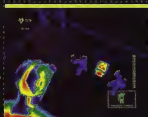
Ubisoft's talent in Shanghai has created a taut, polished successor capable of realizing the series' immense potential. Even with only eight single-player levels in *Tomorrow*, it would be a huge mistake to underestimate the game in terms of both content and length.

Even if trial-and-error style adventures aren't your bag, the game's multiplayer component (including downloadable maps over Live) seals this game in the pantheon of all-time Xbox classics. *Shadow Strike*, the first online multiplayer game of its kind, is a revolution in the stealth genre.

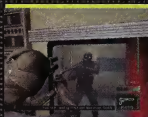
AROUND THE WORLD IN 8 MISSIONS



// **Mission 1: Dili, East Timor.** A guerrilla group lead by Suhadi Sadono has invaded the U.S. Embassy to Dili.



// **Mission 2: Paris, France.** Pursue a mysterious mercenary connected to the attack on the U.S. Embassy in Dili.



// **Mission 3: Paris to Nice, France.** The mercenary, identified as a CIA operative, is on a train bound for Nice.



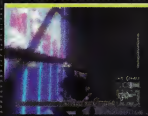
// **Mission 4: Jerusalem, Israel.** Track down a biological virus up for sale in the Israeli black market.



// **Mission 5: Kuningang, Indonesia.** Trail and intercept Sadono's communications in Kuningang.



// **Mission 6: Komodo, Indonesia.** Infiltrate a submarine being used to transmit Sadono's encrypted secrets.

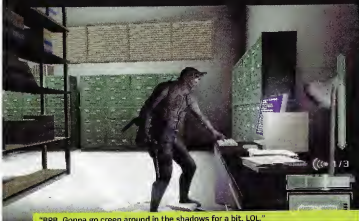


// **Mission 7: Jakarta, Indonesia.** Find and capture rebel leader Sadono in a TV broadcasting station.



// **Mission 8: Los Angeles, USA.** Neutralize the renegade CIA operative along with the last bioterror bomb.

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW



"BBB. Gonna go creep around in the shadows for a bit. LOL."



When the rain comes, they run and hide their heads, they might as well be dead...

TOMORROW IS THE BEST PURE-STEALTH GAME TODAY

> Developed as a completely separate (yet thematically integrated) piece to the overall puzzle by a separate team in Ubisoft's Shanghai office, *Strike* is arguably the best thing to happen to Xbox Live since Microsoft launched its fledgling online playground.

There's absolutely zero indication that *Tomorrow*'s online play was executed as a high-concept, low-effort afterthought. Using *Splinter Cell*'s overriding philosophy that "stealth is everything," *Strike* forces you to play a high stakes game of hide-and-go-seek.

Highly polished and masterfully balanced, *Strike* is the first action game to actively employ

psychological warfare as a necessary means to victory. Believe the hype: Long after the single-player missions have faded from your short-term memory, you'll still be slack-jawed over *Strike*'s online drama. Yes, it's that good.

With single and multiplayer in one fat Xbox package, *Tomorrow* is, without a shadow of doubt, the best pure-stealth action game today. //

Che Chou



XBN 09
OUT OF TEN

XRATED

MX UNLEASHED

MX UNLEASHED

PUBLISHER: THQ // DEVELOPER: Rainbow Studios // PLAYERS: 1-2 // LIVE: No // MSRP: \$39.99 // ESRB: E

Unleash the awesome power of apples! Or motocross!

▶ The first and best test of any motocross game involves zooming up a long ramp and watching your rider's spectacular smash to the ground. The amount of wincing you do in response to seeing the body crumple and imagining the resultant testicular smash directly correlates to the greatness of the physics

engine. Everything else is pretty much gravy at that point.

Yes, MX Unleashed has a damn fine physics engine. It also has a solid array of motocrossing modes. So whether you want to engage in a full motocross career, bust out on some supercross courses, or compete in the nationals, you're covered. Besides the zippy course options, you also have a lot of customizable bikes, ranging from supersmall 50ccs (which are akin to two-wheeled lawn mowers) to burly 500cc models.

The best mode, though, is freestyle. As with the snowboarding epic SSX 3, freestyle lets you wander the open road, taking on random race and stunt challenges whenever you please. Besides being fun and open-

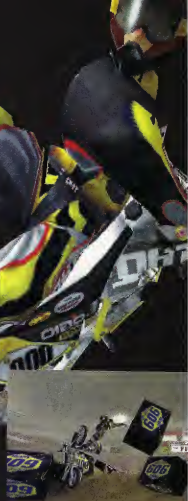
ended, the best parts of freestyle are, the machine races in which you unlock other vehicles. For motocross masochists out there, it's a chance to create spectacular crashes involving helicopters, biplanes, and trucks.

Ultimately, Unleashed rolls out of the box as a solid, if a bit straightforward, title. Its controls feel right, and flip tracks, despite their tendency to resemble each other, look just fine. Even if you're not a believer in pain or a big motocross fan, this might make you one. //

Thierry Nguyen

XBN 07
OUT OF TEN

This racer's last thought: "Clean underwear? Not my style!"



**XRATED**

INTELLIVISION LIVES! // SCOOPY-DOO! MYSTERY MAYHEM

SCOOPY-DOO! MYSTERY MAYHEM

PUBLISHER: THQ // DEVELOPER: A2M // PLAYERS: 1 // LIVE: No // MSRP: \$39.99 // ESRB: E

Ghostbusting made gloriously goofy

⬅ Rhos reware. The Great Dane with the speech impediment and the consummate stoner have put their heads together to make an ass of the corporeally challenged, this time in *Scooby-Doo! Mystery Mayhem*, a 3D adventure with 100 percent less anus-chafing Scrappy-Doo. Saints be praised, and thanks to THQ for properly capturing the mirth and mayhem of the Scooby-Doo cartoons.

As the tag team of Scooby and Shaggy, players hunt down clues and sandwich fixins, solve simple puzzles, use a haunted tome to bust ghosts like Luigi in the hizzouse (or mansion, whatever), and interact with a scabrous cast of no-goodniks, all of whom would have gotten away with it if not for the combined efforts of those meddling kids in Mystery, Inc. Minigames of the wacky variety are tossed in at regular intervals, forcing players to navigate an out-of-control mine cart, take part in an eating contest, and pilot a minilike through a bayou inexplicably laden with wooden ramps and boarded-off dead ends.

A laugh track makes killing off dog and man seem funnier than it actually is. Episode-sized chunks linked by a central plot break up the game nicely, and although *Mayhem* clearly comes built for kids, its breezy gameplay and goofy sensibilities—ghosts can be fooled by sheets draped over the protagonists—win both adult hearts and minds. When Scooby and Shaggy are tasked with leading a freaky ghost into a castle, it's a given their crazy scheme will go awry and the duo will have to make repeated laps around a movie set. Yet the fourth lap is as goofy fun as the first, with bit players Daphne, Fred, and Velma screwing things up for our heroes. The animation gods are well pleased. //

Greg Orlando



Play as Shaggy or Scooby. See if we care!



■ If the man catches Shaggy with his special herbs, it's the haunted prison and soap on a rope for our hero.

INTELLIVISION LIVES!

PUBLISHER: Crane // DEVELOPER: Intellivision // PLAYERS: 2-6 // LIVE: No // MSRP: \$19.99 // ESRB: E

It's not so much living as dead on arrival

➔ The '80s Invasion has made its way to Xbox with *Intellivision Lives!*, a compilation disc featuring virtually every game released for Intellivision back in the days when chunky blocks jagging

their way across the screen passed for football.

Unfortunately, these games are a lot like the ex-girlfriend you fondly remember, but who, unfortunately, the years haven't treated kindly.

These games are classics and a testament to the early days of home videogaming. Now, they're simply a lot of fun—for about 15 minutes. Then the sheer tedium of trying to get the Xbox controller to simulate the clunky Intellivision joystick sets in and all is lost. The *Intellivision Lives!* graphics and simplistic gameplay ran for this disc a painful walk down memory lane.

Lives! features a great interface clearly separating the games by category, some cool music (inspired by the games), and a host of neat extras, such as TV commercials and various playthroughs. But unless you're a die-hard old-school gamer, there's no way you'll reach for *Intellivision Football* when Madden 2004 is out there. //

Dan DiGiacomo



When hemorrhoids attack, beware!

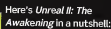
XBN 07
OUT OF TEN**XBN 04**
OUT OF TEN

XBOX NATION // OCTOBER 1, 2003

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

PUBLISHER: Atari // DEVELOPER: Tantalus Interactive // PLAYERS: 1-12 // LINE: Yes // MSRP: \$49.99 // ESRB: M

Good morning, Starshine. The gun says, "Kaboom!"



The player is John Dalton, a kind of outer-space sheriff who's tired of "patrolling the ass-end of nowhere" and would rather join the marines and go where the action is. He's a jerkhead who wants nothing more than to blast a motley assortment of aliens with a motley assortment of weaponry. He gets his wish when a mysterious alien artifact turns up in his jurisdiction and a bunch of silly-looking extraterrestrials come searching for it. Thus begins J.D.'s campaign of shooting, switch finding.

shooting, and yet more shooting. When every last alien antagonist is dead, the credits roll.

The game's first few hours are dreadfully boring, full of genre clichés and pointless firefights. Later on, the kill-em-all wandering gives way to more intriguing missions, like protecting friendly scientists while they repair some doodad or unlock a door. Awakening sure could have used a little more personality during the first few missions, as it is, many FPS veterans will stop playing long before the story's twists make it anywhere near interesting.

The game's designers seem to rely on a plethora of guns (each with an alternate firing mode) to keep us playing. Indeed, half the mission briefings are spent lovingly describing the optimum range of an alien plasma gun and how many rounds fit in the clip of this imaginary assault rifle. At first, all those guns are more or less interchangeable. But when the game's goals eventually graduate to more purposeful action, rather than simple massacres, choosing a weapon begins to matter more.

Luckily, the game's multiplayer modes are quite worthwhile. It's just more fun to play through the story cooperatively, even though the tale remains as unevenly paced as ever. So if you must experience this critter hunt, enlist a friend to tag along. //

Paul V. Byrnes



XBN 07
OUT OF THE



XRATED

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04



Upon closer inspection, this is a screenshot of a car. A blue one.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

PUBLISHER: Codemasters // DEVELOPER: Codemasters // PLAYERS: 1-4 // LIVE: Rarely // MSRP: \$19.99 // ESRB: E

Four most fantastic

Colin McRae Rally 04 is a bargain, but unlike just about every other \$20 videogame, it's actually good. In fact, it's so good that if Microsoft's own *RallSport Challenge* were not around the next brush-lined bend, you could happily pay twice that for

it and go home grinning like a news anchor just before launching into a report about small children getting crushed by a bulldozer.

As it is, you get a lot for very little. This is Codemasters' fourth McRae game, and it shows. Car handling and physics are spot-on, and real-time

damage has been enhanced to the point where you wince every time you hit a rock or other obstacle, as the dents and dings rack up. There's more choice in the cars you can drive this time around, with 20 stupidly torque-filled vehicles available. The so-fast-they-banned-them Group B cars are also here, as are a number of old-school rally cars no one in the United States will have ever heard of.

For rally-heads, Rally 04 is almost as good as it gets. For the uninitiated, however, the instant fun of driving at break-neck speed around farmhouses, quarries, orange deserts, and slate cliffs might fade as the full length of the championship reveals itself. Just like the real thing, it can be grueling. //

Simon Cox



XBOX LIVE

There's no need to worry about Colin McRae Rally 04's Xbox Live mode devouring bandwidth. In Rally 04, you can do nothing more than upload and download lap times and compare them against other racers; it's not exactly cutting-edge stuff, and Codemasters would do well to include real online racing with the game's next iteration.



XBN 08
OUT OF TEN

XRATED

AUTO MODELLISTA

AUTO MODELLISTA

PUBLISHER: Capcom // DEVELOPER: Capcom // PLAYERS: 1-8 // LIVE: Yes // MSRP: \$39.99 // ESRB: E

Here in my car, it doesn't go far, because we can't afford gas

Some six months after its inauspicious PlayStation 2 debut, Capcom's uniquely cartoony racer skids onto Xbox. It's quirky...it's garish...it's horribly annoying. It's like opening the door to find Carrot Top trying to crash your shindig. (Your likely response: "Who invited you?")

Auto Modellista wears its only remarkable quality on its sleeve—scope those wild, candy-colored, cel-shaded visuals! Yes, infusing the hardcore import-tuning scene with surrealistic graphics makes for one attractive, standout experience. The cars look great, as every exciting automotive detail has been faithfully recreated...and

then magically Disney-fied. The resulting look is so bizarre, incongruous, and memorable passersbys will simply have to stop and gawk at the tricked-out 'toon spoilers and comic book-style lines zipping by to represent speed.

Regrettably, these innocent admirers (yourself included) would be ill-advised to actually play the game. The handling is execrable. Someone must have had the misguided idea that an obscene amount of drifting was key to making a good racer, as *Modellista* sends its cars wildly careening around every corner. Seriously, you do not so much take control of

these vehicles—you lose control of them. Prepare to slide around corners, fishtail on straightaways, and spiral into collisions during nearly every race. Weirdly exaggerated wind conditions make the driving even less fun—you'll find it nearly impossible to steer into the gusts of otherworldly force. Overall, the control is so utterly broken that one has to wonder what the developers were thinking. //

Shane Bettenhausen

XBN 03
OUT OF TEN



XBOX LIVE

Auto Modellista offered eight-player online action in its original PlayStation 2 incarnation, and Capcom recreates that same no-frills play here on Xbox. You can access your friends list and engage in some pre-race chatting (Here's a conversation starter: "Man, this game really sucks!"), but skidding around these courses with seven other players doesn't make the game any more fun to play.



In the future, cel-shaded cars will likely drive people to the store.



BREAKDOWN

PUBLISHER: Namco // DEVELOPER: Namco // PLAYERS: 1 // LIVE: No // MSRP: \$49.99 // ESRB: M

Furiously first-person fist fighting

Deftly defying stereotyping, classification, and analogy, *Breakdown* is as cleverly crafted and tightly scripted as they come, and every aspect of its elaborate narrative unfolds—in real time—before the player's eyes. It's not a first-person shooter as much as it is one hell of a sci-fi head

games, will find *Breakdown* suffers from a few too many design flaws: too many dead-end corridors, too much backtracking, touchy controls, and a limited variety of enemies, replete with limited AI. Too much time is spent collecting candy, clips, and colas, which oftentimes tangles the game's otherwise smooth sense

animations lose some of their luster when bounded by simple textures and lighting effects and a limited palette. But every time the player and Cole find themselves hurtling explosive punches with reckless abandon, clambering up and out of harm's way, or, for that matter, phasing in and out of existence, it's an inarguably palpable, almost tangible experience. Sound effects, the score, and—most surprisingly—the voice acting are all quite good; had as much time been spent finessing the surround sound, this might well have been a masterpiece.

But as such, it's an exemplary instance of the sum surpassing its parts, making these shortcomings—technical, visual, environmental, or otherwise—almost entirely forgivable. From the very beginning, which seamlessly segues from comprehensive tutorial to chaotic combat, to its melodramatic conclusion, *Breakdown* never once >

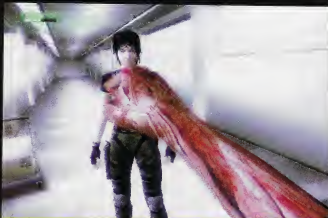
BREAKDOWN'S EXISTENCE REFLECTS A SIGNIFICANT SEA CHANGE FOR GAMES

trip. Literally. And while many of videogaming's most celebrated accomplishments have drawn praise for their cinematic qualities, *Breakdown* takes it to a whole new level by placing you—as one Derrick Cole, amnesiac and humanity's last hope—in the movie.

Self-styled hardcore gamers, especially those weaned on 3D

of continuity. The difficulty level can reach maddening heights, and gunplay, when called for, may put off FPS purists with its autotargeting (although those few who aren't already sufficiently challenged can turn off this feature).

Visually, too, the game falls a bit short—the too-cool art direction and lovingly crafted character



Hallucinations like these are just one of the ways *Breakdown* will toy with your head.





FIGHT OR FLIGHT?

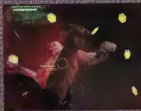
On being Derrick Cole...

Not surprisingly, people have been clamoring to find out just how a first-person puncher plays. We'll just say—for lack of a better phrase—that it works. Very well. Punching, kicking, and their various easy-to-perform combinations are accompanied by a realistic rustling. Cole's clothes and culminate in a rewarding snap. Fold some poor sod's face into the equation, and *Breakdown* on me = wholesome, harmless way to take out your aggression. It gets even better once Cole's abilities have been augmented—sending a hulking T-Lan flying is an action not soon

to be surpassed in terms of the sense of gratification it provides.

But as in real life, surely, it's when the chips are down—when flanked by a herd of topless albinos, for example—that the adrenaline really gets going. Getting knocked around a bit will cause blood to be flung across Cole's field of vision, the corners of the screen flashing red.

More serious fisticuffs find Cole's view severely off-center, with his head lolling and—let's be honest, it's panicky, and it's likely to impart a pair of sweaty palms. It's also the next best thing to getting into a real-life brawl—or so one might assume.





Breakdown features some surprisingly natural dialogue. Xbox Nation recommends playing it with the subtitles turned off.

> slips out of first-person perspective. It's an incredibly significant accomplishment. Early on, the player is thoroughly trained in the nuances of interacting with the troubled world around him, and scripted events tend to be player triggered, ensuring that any jarring disconnects between the player and Cole are, at worst, minimal.

The story, which mixes and matches the best bits from manga, existentialist science fiction, and anime-style military fetishism, is cleverly wrought and sufficiently thought provoking. It's engaging and labyrinthine enough to make renewed discussion about that great 21st-century geek biomatter—*The Matrix*—a less-than-embarrassing prospect. More important, the story is a part of the game; it's not just window dressing. Along the arduous road from foggy amnesiac to full-fledged action hero, the player's sense of identity, place, and—most impressively—time is continually (for lack of a better phrase) broken down through flashbacks, *déjà vu*, and some far more unsettling methods. But because the game begins exactly when Cole regains consciousness, the player is privy to only what his memory-impaired avatar knows—no more, no less. The player is, in essence, Cole.

In the final acts, plot lines are twisted and mind-bending revelations are unveiled. More significantly, what little traditional game artifice (health bars, action icons, reticules) had appeared onscreen is stripped away, rewarding the seasoned player (and those who muscle through will indeed be seasoned) with a feeling of absolute familiarity and, for the most part, power. To say more would spoil some secrets—but it's not surprising a second pass through reveals

nuances that simply would have been impossible to notice the first time around.

Breakdown has—not surprisingly—been the subject of considerable contention, in no small part due to its Japanese roots; a culture that's had a difficult time contending with the first-person perspective. But its existence reflects a significant sea change for videogames: While

certain standards for seemingly similar games aren't met, other aspects of its ingenious approach to a thus-far creatively stymied genre are nothing short of evolutionary.

In spite of any inconsistencies, disparities, or shortcomings, *Breakdown* is an enormously compelling, satisfying game—one imparting a joy of discovery sorely lacking in far too many of today's

biggest titles. And when *Breakdown* is at its best, it lets loose with a far more tactile one-two punch than the standard shotguns-and-sniper-rifles fare could ever hope to convey. //

David Chen

XBN 09
OUT OF TEN

BREAK IT DOWN! ONLY LOSERS FIGHT FAIR

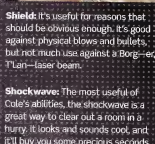
It doesn't take Derrick Cole—and the player—long to realize that his most significant challenge comes not from the military's machine-gun fire, but from the TLAN warriors. All soulless stares, sallow skin, and biomechanical skin suits, these bruisers come in all shapes and sizes and pack a mean punch. More important, they're bulletproof—thank goodness for Cole's set of aifty superskills.



Shield Break: A fancy term for a one-two combo, Cole uses this the first time he stands up to the menacing TLAN, much to the admiration of leading lady Alex.



Jump Kick: Too complicated to be critical, the jump kick is powerful, but it will ultimately be put into use by only the most-skilled players. Stick with the simpler slide attack.



Shockwave: The most useful of Cole's abilities, the shockwave is a great way to clear out a room in a hurry. It looks and sounds cool, and it'll buy you some precious seconds.



Pulse: That fighting-game standard, the space/time-distorting "fireball," is a gratifying way to put down foes from afar. It comes in two sizes: mosquito and freight train.

Boost: Ah, the obligatory ability to slow time. It's cool enough, but if you can't beat the TLAN fairly, then this isn't going to help that much. There are, of course, exceptions....





XRATED

IHRA DRAG RACING 2004 // AMF BOWLING 2004

IHRA DRAG RACING 2004

PUBLISHER: Bethesda Softworks // DEVELOPER: Bethesda Softworks // PLAYERS: 1-4 // LIVE: Yes (content download only) // MSRP: \$39.99 // ESRB: E

What a drag

Bethesda brings all the machinery of the motorheads from 11th-grade shop class used to wet their beds over to *IHRA Drag Racing 2004*. The grueling world of redline drag racing can be explored here, and when the word "grueling" is used, it's meant to describe the game's seemingly bottomless customization and menu features.

The visual presentation looks and feels like an afterthought to the too-deep-for-its-own-good engine-design features. Drag racetracks littered with banners provide the most excitement players will see, with the exception of some nice car-engine fire. The whole visual environment seems muted; it's as if the races were run through a blur filter. There's also a framerate hit whenever something remotely exciting happens.

Sound effects accurately depict the sounds produced by the game's real-world counterparts. Still, there isn't much here to hear, so this accomplishment seems all the more irrelevant.

The game is not so much a drag game as it is a simulation that's a drag. There's a lack of satisfaction obtained from winning; instead, beating the competition instills in players a vague notion of having progressed in a training exercise for a would-be pit-crew mechanic. One of the game's most unforgivable design flaws is that there is simply nothing to gain or strive for when playing. //

Russ Garbut



Third-degree burns for everyone!

AMF BOWLING 2004

PUBLISHER: Gamers // DEVELOPER: Mud Duck // PLAYERS: 1-4 // LIVE: No // MSRP: \$19.99 // ESRB: E

All the fun with none of the disease-ridden footwear

Mud Duck and AMF (the company famed for manufacturing bowling-related equipment) have combined their might to produce *AMF Bowling 2004*. Up to four players can plug into an Xbox and take one another on with fully customizable bowling balls and pins, plus a selection of different alleys. The game tries to deliver 10-pin fun without the nasty shoes.

Graphically, the title does very little to impress. Some of the more

fleshy balls and pins are artistically rendered, but these are last-generation graphics and animation. While it can be noted there are few places a videogame developer can take the source material, the stilted animations and lifeless presentation are nonetheless yawn inspiring.

The game features realistic sound effects making players feel as if they're in the middle of the action. The roll of the ball and crash of the pins are indeed

competently reproduced. Now if only something had been done about the pseudo-honky-tonk music, which makes players feel as if they're in the middle of a hillbilly bar or, alternately, the eighth circle of hell, it would have been a great audio package.

All players have to do is position their bowler, choose a pin to aim for, and then activate a four-step gauge controlling a bowler's start point, accuracy, and ball spin. The ball, pin, and lane physics are as spot-on (frustratingly so...stupid hook) as the developers claim they are.

To the point: It's bowling, it's fun. It's \$20. Nuff said. //

Russ Garbut



What if the Kingpin played 10-pin?



XBN 04
OUT OF TEN

XBN 06
OUT OF TEN

XRATED

MVP BASEBALL 2004

MVP BASEBALL 2004

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts // DEVELOPER: EA Sports // PLAYERS: 1-2 // LINE: No // MSRP: \$49.99 // ESRB: E

Same as it ever was, only more brilliant

Humanity has officially reached the point at which videogame creators—especially those who specialize in athletics—are scratching their heads over what to do next. EA Sports, for example, put out the terrific *MVP Baseball 2003* last season, and it earned rave reviews. But now, just 365 days later, EA's being asked to top that effort with an even better *MVP Baseball 2004*.

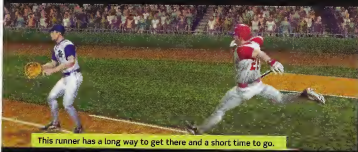
This is unfair.
This is ridiculous.
This can't be done.
This (gasp!) has been done.
Were Babe Ruth, Jackie Robinson,

Barry Bonds, and Alex Rodriguez somehow able to meet (not likely), mate (not pretty), and create the perfect specimen (ever see *Twins*? It's possible), it would look something like 2004. As documented repeatedly in this magazine, the *MVP* line routinely offers fantastic action, a baseball engine tuned to perfection, updated rosters, and lifelike play situations, stadium design, uniforms, etc.

What's different now is depth. For the first time in sports-videogame history, a baseball title has arrived offering not only the major league teams, but also the organizations'

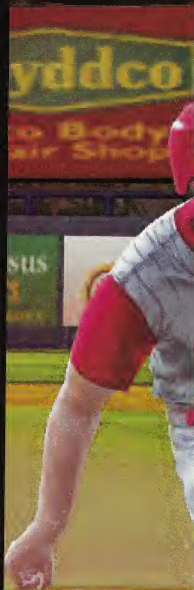
Class AA and Class AAA outlets. Although this results in some nasty exhibition outcomes (New York Yankees 167, Tulsa Drillers -11), it's a diehard's fantasy. Thanks to the game's dynasty mode, any schlub can run, say, the Tampa Bay Devil Rays from the ground up. Wanna call up Dewon Brazelton from Durham? Go ahead—but he sucks. Wanna trade Brook Fordyce for Derek Jeter? Hal! You can't. Jeter's contract is waaaaay too fat for Tampa's small-market dough.

It's equally fun going from minor league stadium to minor league stadium, checking out the intricacies of places like, uh, Trenton. Someone in the EA Sports research department did a helluva job, as the game re-creates Podunk stadiums down to the houses and stables peeking over the outfield fences. // **Jeff Pearlman**



This runner has a long way to get there and a short time to go.

XBN 09
OUT OF TEN





Spending time in the Mudville Nine is better than doing hard time.

COOPERSTOWN COLLECTION

Everything old seems somehow brand-new

The only knock on MVP Baseball 2004 comes with a feature EA Sports excitedly calls its Cooperstown Collection: one has access to authentic retro jerseys, classic stadiums, and legendary players such as Babe Ruth, Jackie Robinson, and Ty

Cobb. Yet the hubbub doesn't match reality. In order to, say, wear the Mets' '86 jerseys or sign Cobb to a contract, a person must first accumulate points via success on the diamond. It is, in a word, stupid. If a guy forks over \$50 for a videogame, he deserves to wear whatever jersey he wants, no questions asked.

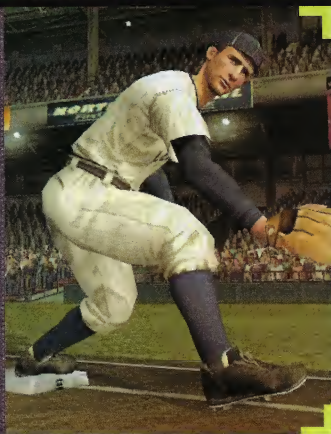
In the end, however, the complaint is a minute one. This one is, hands down, the best baseball videogame ever made, which, naturally, leads to one question: What's ahead in 2005?



■ **Now in the autumn of his years.** "Home Run" Willie Stargell now can more accurately be called "Home Walk."



■ **Fun Fact:** The New York Mets passed up on drafting Reggie Jackson for a scrub catcher named Steve Chilcutt.



WHEELS, GUNS, AND...HULK

COBRA TT RACING WHEEL

PELICAN ACCESSORIES \$34.99

The Good: Lovely vibration effects; decent pedals
The Bad: Difficult to press buttons; no programmable functions

Done up in a not-so-lovely shade of green, the Pelican Cobra TT Racing Wheel is an easy-to-grip sort of rubber device that comes with two pedals, Xbox buttons set on the face, and two plastic bobbins meant to stabilize the wheel when it's on your lap. It's got vibration support that feels very nice in action (especially upon crashing), and the plastic pedals are sturdy enough to not fall apart on you with one careless stomp.

Unfortunately, the Cobra's cheap feel makes it difficult to take for long stints. The face buttons, for one, are a pain—you need to jam your thumb down to get any response, making it unsuitable for handbrake-heavy games. The lap attachments don't work that well, and the bottom-mounted suction cups do a poor job of keeping the wheel on a desktop. Worst of all, the inability to adjust wheel sensitivity results in far-too-slow turning in some games and hypersensitive turning in others. It never feels right, exactly. //

SILENT SCOPE LIGHT RIFLE

PELICAN ACCESSORIES \$49.99



The Good: Works well with the game it was built for; nice recoil feature

The Bad: Only works with two games; difficult to calibrate

Pelican promises its new light-rifle accessory is the only way to get real scope action with Konami's *Silent Scope Complete*. Although the rifle delivers in this respect, its quirky nature, odd design choices, and unusual setup are almost enough to convince one to keep their "real scope action" confined to the mouthwash in their bathroom. The scope on top of the weapon has an autozoom feature allowing you to zoom in on targets just by looking into it. Why anyone would activate this half-baked feature is a mystery, since using this weapon without looking through the scope is impossible, and a player is not going to want to zoom at all times. Zooming is better left as a B-button toggle located on the right side of the pump-action reload handle. //



THEY MADE THIS?!

No, really, someone made this...

Xbox Hulk-Pad

Naki \$29.99

For many millennia, early man prayed to his various gods and idols to create a physical object that was both A) an Xbox controller, and B) an vaguely inaccurate physical rendition of the incredible Hulk.

Now, proving that there is a God, Naki has released the official "Hulk-Pad" for exclusive use with your hulking Xbox. The pad takes its cues from the original Xbox controller, with raised, oval face buttons and the original Microsoft Sidewinder D-pad. (This is not a good thing, unless you are one of the few lucky Hulk-Pad owners to have lost all feeling in your hands, or in fact have no hands to speak of.) While it's hard to resist the undeniable appeal of looking at your crotch and seeing an oddly proportioned incredible Hulk staring back at you, Xbox Nation nevertheless gives this hilariously ugly of a gamepad two thumbs down. //



FILE UNDER L: SNEAKERS

PUBLISHER: Microsoft // DEVELOPER: Media Vision // PLAYERS: 1 // LIVE: No // MSRP: \$29.99 // ESRB: E

Welcome to the Loser File, you damn dirty mice!

↳ What we said then:

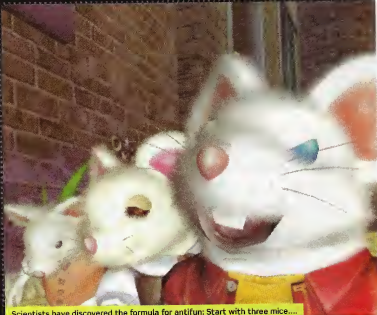
The game's infinitely looped, saccharine-sweet piano music and French-style accordion tunes may, in fact, turn children into the hockey-mask-wearing, ax-wielding maniacs we always see in the movies.

What we say now: When you turn on *Sneakers*, it will tell you to push Start. Don't think it's kidding—do it. If you don't, it will cut to a rap video celebrating the stars of the game, which has since been declared by the United Nations as an act of war. Make no mistake about it: This is not meant to be an irreverent mocking of the creator's talents. "MOUSE IN THE HOUSE!" is a musical demon that crawls inside your mind and defecates on your most precious memories. You'll never think back to any moment of your life without it being there, blaring in your ears. Your first kiss might not have been to a group of street-smart singing mice in *Sneakers*, but it is now. Don't try to run from it: give in. The song is an evil force that resists all Earth weaponry. Mouse in the house! Mouse in the house! Aside from its criminal music,

the game itself is like playing hide and sneak. (Hide and sneak from inside a robot body that's constantly betraying your commands, that is.) The object is to find rats hidden throughout the house, which should be very easy, if not anything close to fun. For example, if you see a hat in the center of an empty floor, go up and look behind it. It's getting there that becomes the problem. Your mouse-in-the-house can only travel on preset invisible paths; so whether or not you really get to walk toward the hat is up to the whims of whatever cruel-mice gods decided to do this to you.

A videogame where you sort of control a passenger on a rat safari is definitely a unique idea. That being said, this game will successfully piss you off in any category of entertainment you'd care to invent. //

Sean Reilly



Scientists have discovered the formula for antifun: Start with three mice...

XBOZO!

Character assassination made easy

No. 1: El Suave

Crimes against humanity: Bad use of male thong and cheesy Spanish accent in the first degree

Appeared in: *Outlaw Golf*, *Outlaw Volleyball*, *Spike or Die*

↳ Congratulations, El Lame! You're the first recipient of Xbox Nation's Xbozo of the Month award, an accolade you'll be proud to show off even when you're old and

gray and making your fellow senior citizens' skin crawl.

This greasy Latin loser was someone's idea of "wacky," so much so that he appeared in not one but two Xbox games. In *Outlaw Volleyball*, *Spike or Die*, lax immigration laws and misuse of thong technology combined to put El Suave in a boss nightmare with a smiley face right on the gates of hell, figuratively speaking.

Being a bad racial stereotype with lots of pelvic thrusting thrown in is bad enough, but El Jerko routinely bleats out such bon mots as, "Yes, I am eye candy. And if you lick me, I last a very long time." "Say good-bye to lunch!" humanity said. For three weeks straight.



BACK ISSUES

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ProTip: Having seen the light, repent of all your sins and become a nun.

UNREALITY ONLINE

Expand your multiplayer mind, man.

Unreal II: The Awakening calls its Xbox Live mode XMP, an unnecessary acronym for "expanded multiplayer." The PC version of the game shipped without it, initially offering only standard deathmatches. Later, a patch enabled Awakening's expanded multiplayer, a much deeper team- and class-based game mode. The Xbox version of the game includes this souped-up multiplayer mode, which makes XMP a totally unnecessary acronym that's also a misnomer.

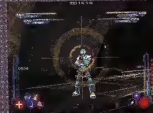
Awakening's XMP requires quite

a lot of strategy and team coordination. Each team's goal is to collect alien artifacts and return them to the team's base. To that end, you and your cohorts may also capture spawn points, turrets, equipment depots, and vehicles. The classes are well differentiated, and because you'll be playing against humans rather than the game's idiotic AI, knowledge of how to use the various weapons and their alt-fires actually pays off.

It's a fine diversion for online shooter fiends who can't wait for Halo 2.



This poor unfortunate soul will never experience the simple joys of a disco inferno—or a face—again.



Further the cause of interplanetary goodwill by offering polite greetings before shooting a cap in the mush.

[00:15:29]



XTRA

OUT OF THE BOX

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STUFF

Don't you want some?

1. BURTON AMP PACK

\$199.95; www.burton.com

Strap in, turn on, rock out. Compatible with the latest generation of iPods, including the new iPod mini, the Amp Pack utilizes SOfTswitch technology, which allows the iPod to be controlled through a soft, flexible control pad built into the pack's shoulder strap. Too bad it's not big enough to hold your Xbox too.

2. FOSSIL WRIST NET WATCH

\$179-\$199; www.fossil.com

Using Microsoft's MSN Direct wireless service (\$59 a year), news, weather updates, a calendar, and personal messages can all be synced and sent to the new Wrist Net watches, created by Fossil, maker of three of the four styles of Microsoft Smart Watches. The watch isn't so pretty, and reviews have pointed out some major flaws (is an instant message instant if it takes 10 minutes?), but it's still a glimpse of what's to come. You just might want to wait awhile.

3. IPOD MINI

\$249; www.apple.com

3.6 ounces of power! That's what you get with Apple's new iPod mini. It comes in a rainbow of fruit flavors, holds 1,000 songs, and features a new Click Wheel that requires only one hand to navigate. Will figuring it out be easier than hooking up Xbox Live? Don't know, but it sure is pretty.

4. BAPE BOX

www.xbox.com/ja-jp

Stylish snap-on Xbox covers will soon be arriving to winners of Microsoft's Japan-only "Dress up the X" contest. The covers feature artwork by six popular Japanese artists and designers. Fashion mogul NIGO submitted this camouflage-inspired cover. Prices for products from his designer brand, A Bathing Ape, regularly eclipse \$1,000 on Internet auctions. If anybody can make Xbox cool in Japan, it's NIGO.



ESSENTIAL SELECTION

Xbox Nation picks the best 50 Xbox games to date

Grand Theft Auto Double Pack

Dev.: Rockstar Games Pub.: Rockstar Games

We like: Two-for-one deals. Fingers on our hands. Straight thugging.

We don't like: Public outcry about declining morals in videogames.

10 OUT OF TEN

Halo

Dev.: Electronic Arts Canada Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: Launch titles that rule, as well as season two of Red versus Blue.

We don't like: Waiting around for a sequel.

10 OUT OF TEN

Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time

Dev.: Ubisoft Montreal Pub.: Ubisoft

We like: Revisits that do justice to the originals.

We don't like: Being bum-rushed by demons who you can't tell apart.

10 OUT OF TEN

Steel Battalion

Dev.: Capcom Pub.: Capcom

We like: Innovation and unapologetically huge controllers.

We don't like: Not reaching the eject button in time and having saves wiped.

10 OUT OF TEN

Beyond Good & Evil

Dev.: Ubisoft Pub.: Ubisoft

We like: Charm, grace, Rastafarian rhinoceroses, and photojournalists.

We don't like: Insta-Boss@brand final bosses and letdowns at the end.

9 OUT OF TEN

Burnout 2: Point of Impact

Dev.: Criterion Pub.: Criterion

We like: Driving on the wrong side of the road—and that's not a swipe at Simon.

We don't like: Burning through *Burnout* in a couple of days. And burns in general.

9 OUT OF TEN

FIFA Football 2004

Dev.: Electronic Arts Canada Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: Electronic Arts finally coming through with a quality soccer game.

We don't like: The whole MS/EA snitfest. Get it together, fellas.

9 OUT OF TEN

Lord of the Rings: Return of the King

Dev.: Electronic Arts Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: Cinematic and levisly produced videogame excellence.

We don't like: Feeling like we're being talked down to.

9 OUT OF TEN

Madden NFL 2004

Dev.: Tiburon Pub.: EA Sports

We like: Owner mode, because we're fond of keeping a close eye on margins.

We don't like: Wondering if EA and Microsoft will ever kiss and make up.

9 OUT OF TEN

Madden NFL 2003

Dev.: Tiburon Pub.: EA Sports

We like: The 13th iteration of anything. Particularly when it's Madden.

We don't like: Artificially equalizing scores on us when we're ahead.

9 OUT OF TEN

Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne

Dev.: Remedy Pub.: Rockstar Games

We like: Bullet time and hard-boiled stuff. You know, like eggs and cops.

We don't like: How quickly it's all over—although preferable to the alternative.

9 OUT OF TEN

Metal Arms: Glitch in the System

Dev.: Gameloft Age Studios Pub.: Universal Universal

We like: Unrepentant cuteness, as long as it's accompanied by good gameplay.

We don't like: No online support—not even a little.

9 OUT OF TEN

Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance

Dev: Konami Pub: Konami

We like: As much Metal Gear as we can get our grubby little meat hooks on.

We don't like: Feeling left out when everyone else gets to skateboard.

9

NBA 2K2

Dev: Visual Concepts Pub: Sega

We like: Better passing, tattoos where they ought to be, and better textures.

We don't like: Being dunked upon frequently and successfully.

9

NBA Live 2004

Dev: Electronic Arts Pub: Electronic Arts



We like: Developers that pay attention to little things. Like rubber bands. A much-improved franchise mode doesn't hurt, either.

We don't like: Not being able to take this baby out on the information superhighway, as well as too-easy, lunging one-handed 40-forters.

9 OUT OF TEN

NFL 2K2

Dev: Sega Sports Pub: Sega

We like: Precipitation-activated virtual mud and other quantum improvements.

We don't like: Getting four-player games instead of broadband deliciousness.

9

Panzer Dragoon Orta

Dev: Sledge Pub: Sega

We like: Being on rails—when the rails rule this much. Prequels don't hurt, either.

We don't like: Confined spaces with willful cameras and tough enemies.

9

Sega GT Online

Dev: NGN Entertainment Pub: Sega

We like: That it's 20 bucks and sports sick online tricks.

We don't like: That it's sort of an updated version of last years.

9

NASCAR Thunder 2004

Dev: Electronic Arts Pub: Electronic Arts

We like: Adaptive (comparatively), intelligent opponents who hold grudges.

We don't like: Very many other NASCAR games.

9

NBA Live 2002

Dev: Electronic Arts Canada Pub: Electronic Arts

We like: Uncut, unsanitized straight-up realistic basketball.

We don't like: Hyperreality—coined by Umberto Eco for "more authentic than real".

9

NBA Street Vol. 2

Dev: Electronic Arts Vancouver Pub: Electronic Arts

We like: Shammie-shams, head or tails, cook 'ems, fole gras, and getting bent.

We don't like: Not being able to listen to Abba or Morbid Angel while dunking.

9

Need for Speed Underground

Dev: Electronic Arts Pub: Black Box

We like: Tweaking our rides out and not having to worry about cops.

We don't like: An endless supply of money. Never thought you'd hear that, huh?

9

NFL 2K3

Dev: Visual Concepts Pub: Sega

We like: Talking smack to your buddies after a particularly punishing victory.

We don't like: Going without midgame saves or a playbook editor.

9

Project Gotham Racing 2

Dev: Quantum Games Dev: Microsoft

We like: Seamless, sensible integration with Xbox Live, even in single player.

We don't like: Relentless AI opponents and strictly stock options for your ride.

9

Soul Calibur II

Dev: Namco Bandai Arts Canada Pub: Electronic Arts

We like: Finally getting our hands on a good, playable Spawn. Virtually, that is.

We don't like: Having to unlock Seung Mina and Sophitia.

9

SSX 3

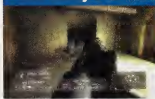


Dev.: EA GIG. Pub.: Electronic Arts

We Like: Series that haven't started to suck. Quite the opposite, actually.**We don't like:** Sounding like a broken record, but we'd really like SSX on Live.

9 OUT OF TEN

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3



Dev.: Ubisoft Montreal. Pub.: Ubisoft

We Like: Realism in tactical shooters. Actually, the convincing illusion of real.**We don't like:** Being cussed at by 1337 h4x0rs two states away.

9 OUT OF TEN

World Series Baseball



Dev.: Blue Shift. Pub.: Microsoft

We Like: Attention to minute detail, even if it means suffering through Tropicana.**We don't like:** Impostor Hall of Famers and janky instant replays.

9 OUT OF TEN

World Series Baseball 2K3



Dev.: 2K Sports. Pub.: 2K

We Like: Exhaustive research and attention to detail.**We don't like:** The thought of attaining baseball perfection, thus ceasing to be.

8 OUT OF TEN

Armed and Dangerous



Dev.: Planet Moon Studios. Pub.: LucasArts

We Like: Blowing stuff up, which everyone knows is catharsis at its finest.**We don't like:** That damn mountain path.

8 OUT OF TEN

Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge



Dev.: FASA Studios. Pub.: Microsoft

We Like: The back story, complete with epic proportions and so on.**We don't like:** Being the equivalent of the mailroom guy in aerial combat.

8 OUT OF TEN

Dynasty Warriors 4



Dev.: Koei. Pub.: Koei

We Like: Heavy-duty depth and overstimulation city.**We don't like:** The occasional graphic glitch. And wearing out our X button.

8 OUT OF TEN

The Sims: Bustin' Out



Dev.: Maxis. Pub.: Electronic Arts

We Like: Being able to remember to tend to our plants and bladders in real life.**We don't like:** Waking up to grisly reality when it's Sim bedtime.

9 OUT OF TEN

Top Spin

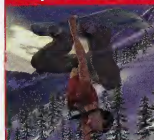


Dev.: Papyrus and Magic. Pub.: Microsoft

We Like: Tennis games that are really RPGs in drag. Shit! Don't tell.**We don't like:** Reading about tennis. Unless D.F. Wallace is doing the writing.

9 OUT OF TEN

Amped 2



Dev.: Microsoft. Pub.: Microsoft

We Like: Swank online-enabled snowboarding while hunting the snowmen. The physics has been switched from "measurable in microns" to "kinda tough."**We don't like:** Rails and jumps, which are still problematic, as well as difficulty, which is brutal one moment but pansified the next.

8 OUT OF TEN

Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon



Dev.: Revolution. Pub.: The Adventure Company

We Like: Any videogame with the Knights Templar in them.**We don't like:** Poverty, chastity, obedience.

8 OUT OF TEN

Deus Ex: Invisible War

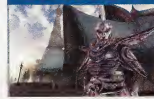


Dev.: No Studio. Pub.: Eidos

We Like: Newtonian mechanics made flesh. And consequences. Sometimes.**We don't like:** The idea of predesiredation.

8 OUT OF TEN

Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind Game of the Year Edition



Dev.: Bethesda Softworks. Pub.: Bethesda Softworks

We Like: More of what we liked the first time.**We don't like:** Little improvements, but at least it's priced accordingly.

8 OUT OF TEN

Hunter: The Reckoning

Dev.: Digital Mayhem; Pub.: Interplay

We like: That someone is addressing the worldwide zombie shortage.

We don't like: Constrictive multiplayer and invisible walls.

8 OUT OF TEN

Jet Set Radio Future

Dev.: SegaSoft; Pub.: Sega

We like: Ninety-degree grinds, revisited controls, and more leisure time for art.

We don't like: Cops and spray paint in an electrically fenced-in environment.

8 OUT OF TEN

killswitch

Dev.: Monero; Pub.: Monero/Parade

We like: Strapping and macking, strategizing and fine-tuned control. Also those lowercased titles, despite what our elementary school teachers say.

We don't like: Low replay value, which is directly proportionate to its Xbox Live "enabledness" (i.e., zero).

8 OUT OF TEN

Otogi

Dev.: From Software; Pub.: Sega

We like: Cameras that behave themselves and demons who die just so.

We don't like: Working for Princess. No overtime, lousy pay, half-hour lunches.

8 OUT OF TEN

RalliSport Challenge

Dev.: Digital Studios; Pub.: Microsoft

We like: Games that grow on you over time and are deep enough for replay.

We don't like: Blandness and delayed gratification in lieu of flashy presentation.

8 OUT OF TEN

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004

Dev.: Electronic Arts; Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: Enchanted jerseys of driving with a +5 against sand traps.

We don't like: Playing offline until the next one comes out (or perhaps forever).

8 OUT OF TEN

James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing

Dev.: EA; Publisher: Sierra; Pub.: EA/Games

We like: Faithful Bond action with classic henchmen and tight control.

We don't like: Funky camera acrobatics and inventory system antics.

8 OUT OF TEN

Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers

Dev.: EA; Publisher: EA; Pub.: EA

We like: An LOTR game that lives up to the story and movie's standards.

We don't like: Little flaws in animations and hack-and-slash redux, even if faithful.

8 OUT OF TEN

MotoGP 2

Dev.: Dream; Pub.: THQ

We like: Authenticity and believability in a motorcycle videogame, Gran Turismo-style.

We don't like: Unforgiving, if occasionally spectacular, physics and plain-old difficulty.

8 OUT OF TEN

Phantasy Star Online: Episode I & II

Dev.: Sonic Team; Pub.: Sega

We like: Sonic Team's charm-free keyboard adapters and multiplayer RPGing.

We don't like: Mandatory monthly fees in excess of what two burritos would cost.

8 OUT OF TEN

The Simpsons: Hit & Run

Dev.: Radical Entertainment; Pub.: Viacom/Universal

We like: Grand Theft Auto-style exploration with neither hookers nor gangsters.

We don't like: Post-post-modernist, self-congratulatory, self-referential humor.

8 OUT OF TEN

TimeSplitters 2

Dev.: Free Radical; Pub.: Eidos

We like: Ten levels of diverse environments and improved graphics.

We don't like: Being thrown into boss battles with no warnings, and opaque goals.

8 OUT OF TEN

HOOK-UPS

Need a little something extra? Xbox Nation recommends...



LOGITECH CORDLESS CONTROLLER

PRICE: \$69.95
www.logitech.com

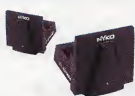
Logitech proclaims, "The Logitech Cordless Controller for Xbox is the controller you've been waiting for," and they're right if you're one who pines over comfortable and well-made peripherals.



XBOX DVD PLAYBACK KIT

PRICE: \$29.95
www.microsoft.com

Because we live in the Bizarro World where Microsoft lets you watch DVD movies on your Xbox only with the aid of a \$30 Xbox DVD Playback Kit. It's the extra you'll hate to buy but love to use.



UNIVERSAL WIRELESS NET EXTENDER

PRICE: \$99.00
www.nyko.com

Plug the extender into your DSL line or cable modem and be free of cable mess. With a range of 100 feet, you can have your high-speed connection in one room and your online Xbox in another.



MAGIC BOX

PRICE: \$24.90
www.lik-sang.com

The Magic Box has seemingly been produced by grand wizards who envisioned a world where Xbox owners could play their games with Dreamcast, Saturn, or PlayStation 2 controllers.

...BE AFRAID. BE VERY AFRAID

Five games that you should, under no circumstances, pay for



AQUAMAN: BATTLE FOR ATLANTIS

DEV: TDK MEDIACTIVE PUB: TDK MEDIACTIVE

→ To its credit, basing a game around someone talking to fish is one of the true acts of bravery in all the Earth's history. But, people of the world, if everything under the sea is this lame, then go ahead—kill the whales. To speak technically, Aquaman: Battle for Atlantis is like a cross between a case of dysentery and a case of dysentery that causes the hospital staff to scream and chase you away with torches. And then you get billed for it. Twice.

XBN SCORE: 3

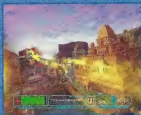


DARK ANGEL

DEV: RADICAL ENT. PUB: SERRA/TDK INTERACTIVE

→ Based on a TV show and featuring repetitive button-mashing fights, lame Matrix-rip-off effects, and sassy taunting, Dark Angel brings all the things wrong with videogames together at last.

XBN SCORE: 2



SEABLAST

DEV: VISIONSCAPE PUB: SPHINX AND SCHUSTER

→ In the future, mankind is enslaved in an underwater world and forced to fight back using SeaBlades! But once mankind flies one of these spastic things, it might consider sticking with enslavement.

XBN SCORE: 2



STAKE

DEV: GAMESNESS PUB: METRO ID

→ Stake is such a mess it almost seems to have been designed to just sort of resemble a videogame, maybe by movie producers for the background of a chase scene through a nerd's room.

XBN SCORE: 2



BIG MUTHA TRUCKERS

DEV: BUTCHERBOX PUB: EMPIRE INTERACTIVE

→ Chances are slim that anyone loves the joke "Truck drivers are dumb!" so much they'd play an awful game just to hear it reworded 1,000 times, but strangely enough, that's what happens here.

XBN SCORE: 3

PRIMA SPECIAL THANKS

Trickery for *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*, *The Sims*, *Bustin' Out*, and *James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing* have been sneakily nabbed from Prima's official strategy guides. Tell not a soul.

TIPS AND TRICKS

Why? Because we care....this month: Bond, Sims, and Mr. Fisher

Looking for button-press cheats that are actually tested? Rampant trickery from the mind-bending to the possibly quite tedious? It's all here in the all-new, all-singing, all-dancing, partially tipsy, slightly too tactile, overly aggressive, swearing-violently, staggering-to-the-bathroom, upchucking-in-the-taxi Tips section.

JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

Male Bonding

Whether it's the overly hairy chest of Sean Connery or the ill-fitting ginger wig of Roger Moore, the winning combo of a suave and sexy British agent fighting gigantic henchmen (with the inability to kill anyone wearing a tuxedo) has wooed moviegoers around the globe for...what, centuries? Now EA is back with the best Bond game since Rare's golden child *GoldenEye*. What's more, we've got the Bond essentials to separate the Brosians from the George Lazenbys.



BOND TIP NO. 1

HE JUST DROPPED IN FOR A QUICK BITE...

You will face off with James Bond's legendary nemesis, Jaws, at various points during the game.

- 1 In the mission "An Old Friend," use the columns of electricity in the train car to shock Jaws into submission. When he throws a steel column at you, use the pillars behind you as cover. **Use a three-punch combination to knock Jaws back a few steps.** Adjust your position so you knock him toward the electric current.
- 2 After one or two shocks, Jaws may charge at you. Position yourself so that you are in between Jaws and a column of electricity—when he charges, roll or run to one side to avoid him. If you're positioned properly, Jaws will charge right into the column and fry himself, like, good.
- 3 In "The Pontchartrain Bridge" mission, to disable Jaws' truck, use the flamethrower weapon to destroy its rear wheels.



BOND TIP NO. 2

"JAMES BOND, YOU APPEAR WITH THE TEDIOUS INEVITABILITY OF AN UNLOVED SEASON."

In the mission "A Show of Force," you'll be manning the weapons of a tank as it trundles along through a coastal South American village. Three of the Bond Moments found in this mission involve the tank.

- 1 To earn the first Bond Moment, **use the tank cannon to blow up the fortress gate at the very start of the mission.** (The tank cannon has a reload lag time of several seconds between shots, so make sure you've aimed properly before firing a shot.)
- 2 To earn the second Bond Moment, just after moving up a large stairway ramp but **before driving through the pottery store, use a tank cannon to blow up explosives next to two soldiers.**
- 3 To earn the third Bond Moment, **when you reach the gas station, do not engage the enemies here.** Instead, target the gas pumps with the tank cannon. You can see where this is going, right? This will trigger a chain reaction that'll knock out all the enemies nearby. It may also raise gas prices in the area for the next hundred and 50 years.



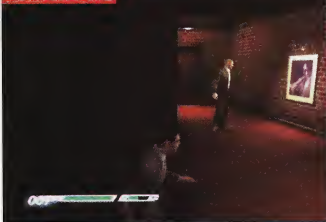
ROGER AND OUT

Slightly Fun Bond fact: Roger Moore, the third actor to play the spy, was a creaky 58 years old when he finally threw in the towel on the role that had brought him fame, fortune, and a (ahem) "fluctuating" waistline. His last Bond movie was 1985's *A View to a Kill*, which made \$50.3 million.

XTRA

JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

BOND TIP NO. 3



"PAY ATTENTION, 007."

In the "Kiss Kiss/Club" mission, complete it without firing a bullet. One key is to get to the stage area without sounding the alarm.

1 When the mission begins, climb up to a second-floor room. **Give the woman inside a massage to earn a Bond Moment.** Leave the room and hide around a corner, then stealth attack the guard when he appears. Stay crouched and immediately go through the door to some stairs. Don't go down just yet—head left to a security control room.

2 Stealth attack the closest guard, then the monitor guard. **Activate a switch in front of the control panel to open the stage area door.** Leave the room and wait at the top of the stairs for a guard. When he turns back, creep down the stairs, then stealth attack the departing guard. Without stopping, get to the second guard. Stealth attack him before he turns around.

BOND TIP NO. 4



"I'D HATE TO GO OUT HALF-COCKED"

One of the more elusive Bond Moments in the "Ambushed" mission is to find a room with a rocket launcher and armor vests inside. Here's how you do it:

1 The reason why it's elusive is that **you have to find a key card to unlock the door to that room in an earlier mission**, one titled "A Simple Exchange." To find the key card in that mission, first activate your nano suit and then quickly head across the first floor to find a guard patrolling an outdoor patio.

2 Get behind him and perform a stealth attack, then deactivate your nano suit to save battery life. **When you dispatch the guard in the outdoor patio area, he will drop a key card.** It's important that you pick it up and then finish this mission. As a result, when you begin the "Ambushed" mission, you'll have the key card that will allow you access to that room, which is located on the first floor at the end of a narrow hallway.

Because we know you didn't read the manual...

Three cards, a hint: tips to help you avoid being stolen, or stolen, for that matter.

1. Crouch! Checking out the situation before you go rushing in? Crouch. Standing in the shadows? Crouch. Reload your Walther PPK? Crouch.

2. Camo! When fighting mano-a-mano, bring together camos and use the throw move (X+Y) to dispatch those pesky henchmen.

3. Head shot! An easy one, even after a few bottles of vodka, 007. Once you get a lock on a target, just thump up the stick and fly and the cursor should settle right in the middle of the bad guy's melon. Pull the trigger, then pour yourself another Stolichnaya on the rocks and relax until attacked again.

BOND TIP NO. 5



"BOLLINGER? IF IT'S '69, YOU WERE EXPECTING ME."

One of the biggest secrets is a hidden weapons and armor vault in the final mission, aptly titled "Everything or Nothing."

1 To reach this secret area, you must first earn a Bond Moment in an earlier mission, "Dangerous Descent." **At the start of that mission, send a Q Spider underneath the railing** nearby to navigate over some metal boxes. A thin pillar and slanted board will lead to an open window.

2 Once inside, look for an opened door and watch the guard in the next room. Once that guard opens a vault door, eliminate him—this opens the vault door for the "Everything or Nothing" mission. So when that mission begins, **send a Q Spider out to look for an opening** that will ultimately lead up some stairs to the starting point of the "Dangerous Descent" mission.

3 Once there, return to the same path used in the "Dangerous Descent" mission to return to the vault room. Equip the Q Spider, sleeper dart to subdue the guard in that room, then look for a locked metal door with a reinforcing brace. **Detonate the Q Spider to unlock the door to the vault.**



MY FIRST SIM

Little Computer People debuted in 1985. Published by Activision, the game used the clock in the Commodore 64 home computer to keep track of daytime/nighttime cycles in the house of your little computer person, who read books, played cards and piano, and played with his dog. Er, cool.

THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT

Mother knows best



SIMS TIP NO. 1



HOUSE PARTY: LEVEL 1

↳ Be sure you build up some skills at Mom's. This is due to the many maternal forces at work at Mom's house that artificially support your mood.

It's a great place to work on skills; just move back to Mom's any time you need some training. Use this advantage and **get your cooking and mechanical skills up** to at least level 3 before you get a job. Once you've done that, you'll be competent enough to enjoy the finer things in life and not have to resort to the age-old tactic of boarding up your Sim in a tiny room, watching him pee his pants and take a dump in the potted plants.

SIMS TIP NO. 2



MOM AND THE MOPED

↳ Once the scooter is unlocked, either Mimi or Dudley (depending on which job you took and which house it unlocked) will periodically drop by.

1 While you're at Mom's, **raise your Relationship score with Mimi or Dudley up to 50**. With the motive support from Mom's house, it's easier to do here than after you move.

2 Also become friends with Mom. You'll need lots of friends later in the game and Mom is almost a "free friend." Abuse this parent-child relationship, but don't try to apply these techniques in real life or you'll eventually become a 40-year-old basement-dwelling manic depressive whose only real friends are Pat and Leo from TechTV's *The Screensavers*. Or, perhaps, a videogame reviewer.

SIMS TIP NO. 3



MATERNAL MOOLAH

Not only can you increase your skills at Mom's, but there's a great deal of cash to be had here, too. Is your cash flow on a par with Mike Tyson's? (That's bad, by the way.)

Resist the facial tattoo temptation, and instead **head to Mom's when your balance drops below 100 simoleons**. The phone will eventually ring with more money. Repeat this as many times as you like. When it's time to move out, sell everything you bought, and you'll have more cash than you started with.

THIS IS THE WAY.

Other racing games can only FOLLOW.



TOCA



coming spring 04 ■ www.codemasters.com/tocaracedriver2

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HALF PAST LARGE

He also eats: Details of metabolically challenged Steven Seagal's shadowy background remain, well, shadowy. The increasingly hefty martial arts star has allegedly claimed he spent some time working for the government in some kind of special-ops capacity. Et... Navy Whales?

XTRA

SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

The Fisher price of freedom

SCEPT TIP NO. 1



LAX SECURITY?

↳ Airport security has been beefed up tight. Besides the security guards, watch dogs, surveillance cameras, and motion detectors, *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* also throws innocent civilians into the action.

1 When it's time to infiltrate LAX Airport in your last mission, you must breach each level of security to reach your primary target. It's tough enough to dodge the sniffing police dog in the parking lot, sucker the armed guard to open his vault door, and identify all the undercover terrorists who are sworn to kill you on sight, but it gets worse.

2 When you enter the airport proper, the civilians pull the alarm bells on you. In other missions, an alarm goes off whenever a guard radios in an alert or a surveillance camera spots you. **In the airport, at the first sign of a disturbance, civilians will run for alarm panels placed on most of the airport walls.** Even after the alarm sounds, you can stop them.

3 Beat them to the alarm panel and knock them out before they can press the button. You may have caused a bystander to go into a screaming panic, but a timely intercept saves you from an otherwise certain game reboot.

SCEPT TIP NO. 2



KING OF FIGHTERS

↳ Do you want to be a white belt or a black belt? Your martial arts skills can only take you so far if you can't analyze your victims and immediately ascertain their weaknesses.

1 Fighting each target the same way is like a boxer throwing punch after punch without playing defense—evenually, a counterattack will uppercut you into next week. The first rule of Fisher fight club: **A punch from a crouched position, especially coming from the victim's front, is too risky.** More than half the time, your target will shrug off the attack and call for the alarm. It can be knuckle-chompingly frustrating to hit guys and have them stand there like they're made of granite.

2 Stand in the shadows, if you can, then punch the victim from the side or back. Timed correctly, a punch like this will drop your victim in one shot. More importantly, study your victim's wardrobe. **Don't swing at a terrorist wearing a helmet. Against an armored foe, a "grab" move from behind always works best.**

Grace under pressure

After the initial relief that Ubisoft Montreal didn't go all "Hideo Kojima" and switch control from Sam Fisher to an effeminate whining hippy with girlfriend trouble after three minutes of play in this second stealth outing, players may have gradually edged to the nearest corner and started rocking in the fetal position due to the difficulty of the game. Thankfully, there are a few fact-based strategies designed to make the most out of your stealth rampage.



XBN WANTS YOUR TIPS! That's right—we want you to send in your coolest tips, cheats, and secrets. The best ones will be printed in the pages of *XBN*, and if we don't get many, then some of the worst ones, too! E-mail them to us at XBN@ziffdavis.com.

CODE-X

Type code. Cheat. Repeat.

All-new for XBN—a codes section. This month, you can unlock the original *Prince of Persia*, find all-star teams in *NFL Street*, inflict maximum pain in *Max Payne 2*, watch videos in *Grabbed by the Ghoulies*, and, er, “Team Fighter Mode Character Variation,” whatever that means, in *Wrath Unleashed*.

PRINCE OF PERSIA:
THE SANDS OF TIME3D ORIGINAL
PRINCE OF PERSIA

Start a new game, keep your Arabian knight on the balcony, press down on the left analog stick, and quickly tap **A, X, Y, B, Y, A, X, B**. Nothing happening? Try again until the game loads automatically (don't enter the curtains) for a pointless but strangely satisfying romp around the original *Prince of Persia* level with new game graphics.

Level 4 IYVPTC
Level 5 RWSWWC
Level 6 GONWUC
Level 7 DEFNUC
Level 8 SVZMSC
Level 9 DBJRPC
Level 10 MZFVSC
Level 1 BRAYQC
Level 12 UUGTPC
Battle with Jafar LRARUC

ORIGINAL PRINCE OF
PERSIA (FULL GAME)

Relive the good old days of gaming where jumping over spiked pits was more a question of luck, not judgment. Just complete the game and the original *Prince of Persia* becomes available to play through fully, in all its shockingly primitive but ultimately exquisite glory.

ORIGINAL PRINCE OF
PERSIA PASSWORDS

If those blue-hued catacomb traps are chumping over spiked pits were more a question of luck, not judgment. Just complete the game and the original *Prince of Persia* becomes available to play through fully, in all its shockingly primitive but ultimately exquisite glory.

Level 2 KIEJSC
Level 3 VNNNPC

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2:
THE SHADOW AND
THE FLAME (FULL GAME)

This is what's known as “value for money.” You've got one of the best action games of 2003, plus an entire old-school classic. Plus its sequel? Nice work, Ubisoft. Unlock POP2 about a third of the way through the game. After obtaining a new sword, start breaking wells. When the Prince utters the line, “It's said they built the palace on the ruins of another,” cross into the next room to a switch you can rotate. Move directly behind that and break the wall (though it appears solid) by striking it three times for a hidden room and a message letting you know you've unlocked the game (in the Extra Features area). Feel free to rotate the switch until it points to this room, opening a gate that allows you access to the POP2 realm without quitting your game. Then gawk at how horrendous graphics were a decade ago.

NFL STREET

UNLOCKABLE
TEAMS

Ever wonder what Howe Long's been up to now that Shag's taken over as spokesman for Radio Shack? Well, he's lent his almost entirely unrecognizable image to *NFL Street* as a secret “unlockable” team. Instead of all that “gameplay” to unlock the teams, simply start a new game and type one of the following codes (which are case-sensitive) as your user name. Then start a Quick Game and choose that name to access the particular team you want. Yes, that means these codes only work on this game mode.

User Name	Team
AE3278	AFC East All-Star Team
AN6789	AFC North All-Star Team
AS6884	AFC South All-Star Team
AW9378	AFC West All-Star Team
NS3278	NFC East All-Star Team
NN6789	NFC North All-Star Team
NS9378	NFC South All-Star Team
NW9378	NFC West All-Star Team

...AND, UH, WE ALSO WANT YOUR CODES... That's right—not content with merely using our readers to write tips and secrets for us, we're now asking you to send in your juiciest codes. If they're good, send them to: XBN@ziffdavis.com.

MAX PAYNE 2



↳ For max pain and minimum fuss, start a new game, then tap **X, X, X, A, Left, Right, Left, Right, X, X, X, A, Left, Right, Left, Right**. (Direction buttons are on the D-pad.) Head back to the Main menu, and select New Game again. All the modes and levels are now unlocked, allowing you to terribly maim punks in a variety of grimy locales with less skill than ever before.

GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES



↳ Here are a couple of Easter eggs you may not have uncovered in Grabbed by the Ghoulies. Follow this incredibly laborious plan to find them.

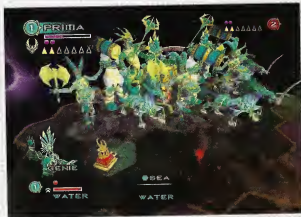
- 1 Collect the 100 Rare Bonus Books to open up the 20 challenges.
- 2 Now achieve gold ranking or higher on all 20 challenges to open up the hidden 21st challenge. Weep quietly as you're asked to repeat the entire game playing as Amber, but with only 10 health in each room and no soup for you.
- 3 Finish this task, and hunt around the Options screens to uncover a secret video showing early E3 demos of the game. Proof of this Easter egg is contained in the screenshot above.

They're not what you think...

In case you're ever fortunate enough to visit merry old England, you might be interested to know that "ghoulies" meant leeches until the late 19th century.



WRATH UNLEASHED



Time to wake up Grandpa; the remake of 1984's Amiga smash-hit *Archon* (and the PS1's *Unholy War*) finally got itself some cheat codes.

CODE EFFECT: Large World Map Critters

WHERE ENTERED: Title screen

BUTTON PRESSES NEEDED: Left, X, Up, Y, Right, B, Down, B

CODE EFFECT: Hyper Extended Fighting

WHERE ENTERED: Title screen

BUTTON PRESSES NEEDED: Down, Down, Up, Down, Left, Right, Down, Up, Up, Up, Right, Left, X

CODE EFFECT: Versus Mode Character Variations

WHERE ENTERED: Versus Creature Select menu

BUTTON PRESSES NEEDED: L-trigger, L-trigger, Down, Down, Black, White, Black, White, R-trigger, L-trigger, Black, R-trigger, R-trigger, White

CODE EFFECT: Team Fighter Mode Character Variation

WHERE ENTERED: Team Fighter Creature Select menu

BUTTON PRESSES NEEDED: L-trigger, L-trigger, Down, Down, Black, White, Black, White, R-trigger, L-trigger, Black, R-trigger, R-trigger, R-trigger, White

EXIT

COMING SOON IN THE MAY ISSUE OF XBN.

HITMAN: CONTRACTS REVIEWED

Be the very first to get the verdict on lo's sniper-scoped sequel to the best-selling *Hitman 2*. An XBN exclusive!

PLUS: Up close with Peter Molyneux and *Fable* // First look at *Far Cry* for Xbox // ...and, finally, *Ninja Gaiden* rated!

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